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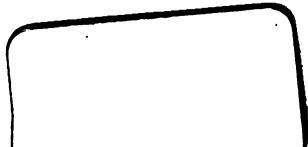
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YOUNG  
BROWN  
*on the*  
Law of Inheritance





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YOUNG BROWN

VOL. I



# YOUNG BROWN

OR THE

**LAW OF INHERITANCE**



BY

THE AUTHOR OF 'THE MEMBER FOR PARIS'  
'MEN OF THE SECOND EMPIRE' &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

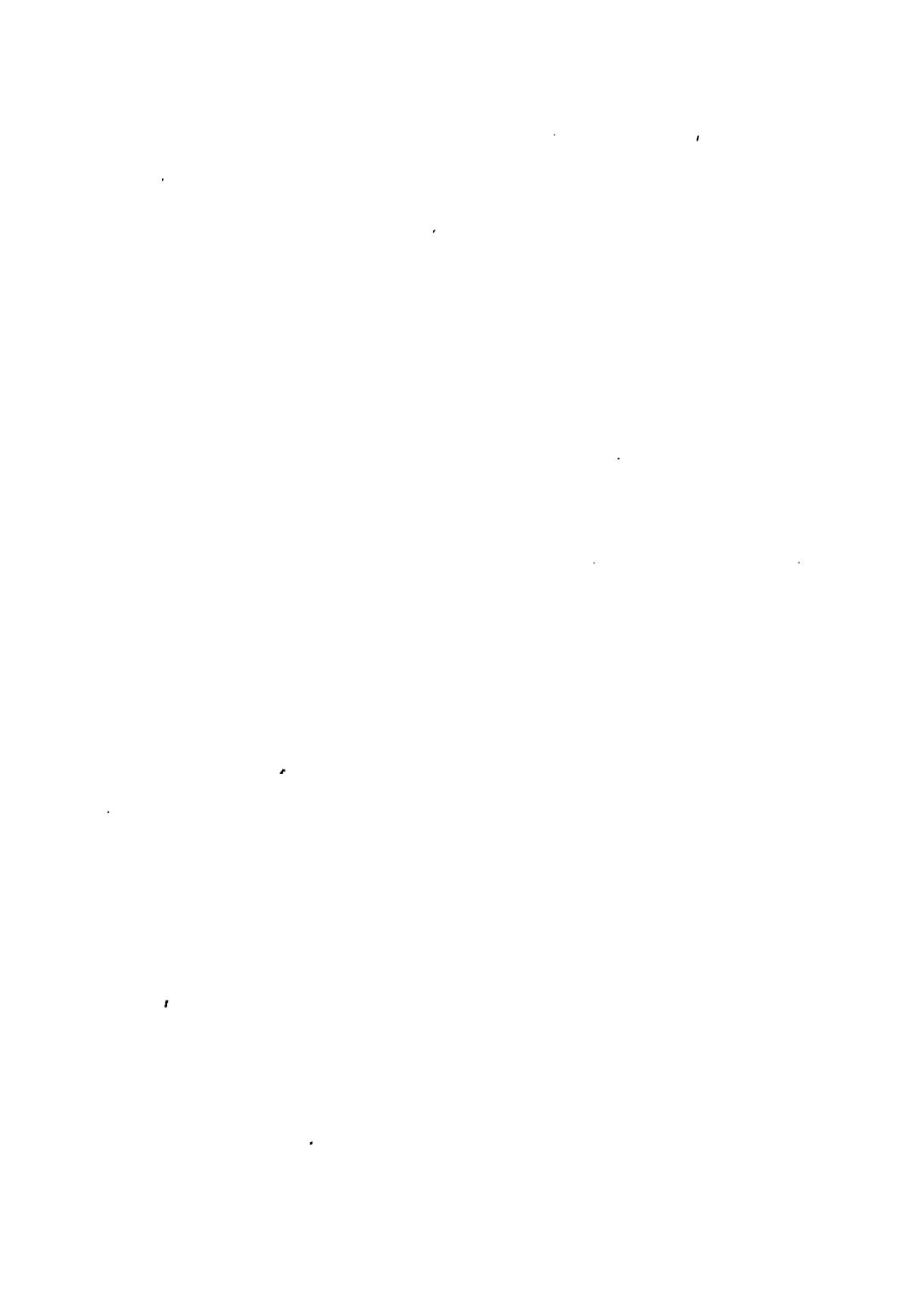
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## P R E F A C E.

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On m'a dit que pendant mon absence il s'est établi dans Séville une espèce de liberté, et pourvu que je ne parle ni du roi ni de la cour, ni du clergé ni de l'Église, ni des grands, ni des gens en place, ni de quoi que ce soit qui ressemble à quelque chose, je puis tout écrire et imprimer librement, sauf l'approbation de trois ou quatre censeurs.

BEAUMARCHAIS : *Mariage de Figaro.*

WHILST the story of 'Young Brown' was being published in the 'Cornhill Magazine' it was praised with perhaps undue enthusiasm by some, and censured with a bitterness equally undeserved by others. Certain critics declared that the book was full of personalities; others, having misunderstood the leading incident, published that Madge was sister to the Duke of Courthope, and charged me with improbability, as well as with an offence more disagreeable to the present temper of the public mind.

Dealing first with the question of personality, I must ask what is the meaning of that rage which has fallen upon critics for descrying personalities whenever a Peer of fiction is sketched in other

than conventional colours? From what I can gather of the works of the best modern novelists, it is allowable to describe a peer as a person of dull wits: Thackeray and Dickens have done it, so have Mr. Disraeli and Mr. Anthony Trollope. In the matter of baronets the licence allowed is greater: Mr. Wilkie Collins, to name but one among many, has given us a baronet or two who deserved hanging; yet surely with respect to baronets the charge of personality is easier to concoct, for baronets are a closer corporation than peers, and for every roguish Sir John of fiction a dozen honourable Sir Johns might start up in the flesh and inquire why they were being lampooned?

When it comes to clergymen, officers, lawyers, soldiers, and bankers—generally speaking prudent and well-behaved persons—no restrictions whatever are placed on the author's pen, and most of the villains of current literature are drawn from one or other of these categories. But if an officer, a clergyman, or even a baronet can be portrayed as a villain without offending the susceptibilities of those who may have officers, clergymen, and even baronets among their relations, then why not a Peer—especially if we concede the premiss that his Lordship, or his Grace, may be a person of feeble intellect and therefore slightly confused in his notions of right and wrong?

Until a critic shall have proved to me that there is something so purifying in the atmosphere of the House of Lords that it rids the soul of all foibles to which humbler flesh is heir, I shall contend that a Duke, placed under strong temptations, may occasionally succumb like the baronet. And I shall claim to illustrate the point without being accused of personality.

There are no personalities in this book. Following the traditions of the best writers of fiction, I have taken my characters from living models; but I have held up no individual, living or dead, to shame. Some of the incidents of 'Young Brown' are true, but the personages are imaginary. I know of no Duke or Peer who acted as the Duke of Courthope, of no usurer who could be identified with Mr. Sharpe, of no forlorn girl like Madge Giles. A few of the facts related are, I repeat, within my knowledge; but the characters of the book are studied from people mostly dead now, who had nothing but their natures in common with the personages of this story. They belonged to a different class of life, and had other surroundings and other adventures. It seems ludicrous enough that one should be obliged to make such a statement.

Coming now to the charges of improbability—and of 'something worse,' I have pointed out that the 'something worse' was imputed from a mis-

understanding, Madge Giles not being, as was supposed, the sister of the Duke of Courthope. But the fact remains that the Duke deceived Madge, whose real name and claims to his own estate were unknown to him as they were to herself. The Duke had no right to the title he bore, for he was not the son of his supposed father: Madge, on the other hand, was that father's daughter, her mother having been privately married to the former Duke and then abandoned by him. All these things are duly explained, and would have excited no comment had the chief personage been plain Mr. Courthope, a line officer or a draper's assistant. But I wished to call attention to certain crying evils in our laws of inheritance; and I purposely made my characters move in high life that their sins and the retribution which fell on them by reason of those sins might be more conspicuous, and in order, too, that readers being struck by the exalted rank of the offenders might learn to view in the proper light a class of misdeeds for which society is apt to be over lenient or indifferent, when they are committed by small folk. When Swift desired to paint political corruption he laid his scenes in Lilliput, because the sight of all those pygmies agitated by unworthy ambitions was ridiculous; when he attacked social vices he went to Brobdingnag, because im-

modesty and uncleanness exemplified by overgrown persons became grosser and more repelling.

I will go further, and remark that if I had followed out to their logical consequences the miseries which result from crimes, treated as peccadilloes, I should have written a better book and pointed a truer moral. In our artificial state of society, and with our unjust customs of inheritance, a large family is a sore burden even upon a rich man. It is difficult to make a satisfactory provision for younger sons, who have been reared expensively and who object to marry unless they can endow their wives with all the luxuries to which they themselves have been accustomed. Therefore in many cases they do not marry, and their fathers, possessing entailed estates in which they have but a life interest and which are often heavily encumbered, are led to look with extreme indulgence upon the sins which attend enforced celibacy—sins which do not hurt themselves, but which fall very heavily on others. The Divorce Court offers a very full record of instruction, and the record would be fuller were it not notorious that family interest and money are continually employed at the eleventh hour to compromise cases out of court and avert exposure. The Registrar-General's statistics of illegitimacy are not less instructive.

According to recent returns the illegitimate births in England are to the legitimate in the proportion of 27 per cent.; in Scotland, 32; in Ireland, 15; and this not reckoning infanticides, which are said to be steadily on the increase. But what becomes of all these castaways?

Supposing that a young mother and her child are deserted by a heartless—or, in deference to the objection which exists to plain language, I will say a thoughtless—gentleman who goes his ways back into the world from which he wandered in search of pleasure, leaving the forsaken girl and her infant to earn their bread in the lowly paths of life; and that he never sees them again? Surely such events have happened and are happening around us; and if that be so and the false lover married, it might easily come to pass that, in future years, his son by this marriage might meet his abandoned daughter—who would probably be a poor, untaught girl—with results which need not be insisted on. If they married in ignorance of their relationship, how could they be blamed? The girl might become a servant in the house of her kindred, or, as Lord Lytton pointed out in ‘Paul Clifford,’ she might be sent to gaol by her own father, acting as judge. Again, what if Young Brown, the son of the Duke, had entered a foreign service and slain his father in battle? or what if he had turned habitual criminal

—I have shown that he had begun to be a poacher and would have gone from bad to worse had it not been for the providential interest taken in him by the parish clergyman—what if he had turned burglar and murdered his brother, Lord Kinsgear, instead of saving his life as I have made him do?

In my desire to demonstrate this maxim, that ‘whosoever is father of a child is responsible for a human soul and is bound to watch over his offspring,’ I might have worked out any of the above situations without trespassing on probabilities. But I was warned that I had much exceeded customary licence in supposing that a Duke could behave like a loose character; and that if I ventured on anything in the way of unreserved truth-telling, the sensitive public of this kingdom would positively not stand it.

It appears indeed that of late a taste for the insipid and common-place has grown up in England. It has been laid down as a rule which no author may transgress on pain of blighting accusations, that only ordinary occurrences, apart from those relating to theft or murder, may be introduced into novels. Take for the delineation of character the typical vestryman: do not go much below him, for the vices of the lower orders are held for granted, and enumerations of them are uninteresting—nor much above him, for you would

reach the upper classes. Confine yourself for incident to facts last quoted in the police-courts ; and yet do not be too true, or you would be plagiarizing the newspaper reports ; nor too graphic, for you would be taxed with sensationalism. Avoid conveying instruction, for that would be writing a novel with a purpose ; and beware of moralizing, for of preachers we have plenty. If you touch on politics, show yourself respectful, as if you were convinced that our form of government was one for which we had need to give thanks ; otherwise you will be a party man, warming up stale leading articles, or a man with a grievance, which is worse. Keep clear of assailing the living, for the law of libel is there ; and say nothing about the dead, although the evil they may have done lives after them. Above all refrain from analysing any of the misguided passions by which even the greatest natures pay tribute to their mortality, for the first and last object of the romance-writer in these our times should be not to startle school-girls or the subscribers to circulating libraries.

Now against this code of doctrines I protest, for it ensures impunity to all sorts of evil. It degrades the functions of the writer into those of a mere bandier of trifles, a painter of unreal things, an amuser instead of a teacher. It would have robbed us of the *Iliad*, founded on the story of Helen's desertion of Menelaus ; and of the *Aeneid*, for how could

a poet regardful of the proprieties have sung the loves of Dido and Æneas? It would have debarred Sophocles from writing his two tragedies of *Oedipus* and his *Electra*, Anacreon his Odes, Virgil his Bucolics, Ovid his Fasti, Tibullus and Propertius their Elegies, Horace, Juvenal, and Martial their Satires, Terence and Plautus some of their wittiest comedies, Longus his charming novel of 'Daphnis and Chloe,' and Apuleius his humorous tale of the 'Golden Ass'—the first regular novel, by the way, ever written. In more modern times it would have clean sponged away some of the best works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Pope, and Dryden, the novels of Fielding and Smollett, and Richardson's 'Clarissa Harlowe.' It would have deprived us of Racine's 'Phèdre,' of Molière's 'Tartuffe,' of Le Sage's 'Gil Blas'; it would have deterred Victor Hugo from giving us his 'Marion Delorme,' 'Le Roi s'amuse,' and his 'Notre Dame de Paris,' to name only the best of his works; and it would have altogether silenced Balzac, to whose admirable series of novels future historians will ever be compelled to refer when they want correct pictures of French society during the first half of this century. Nay, in quite recent times and in our own country the censorship of sundry purists would have suppressed George Eliot's grandest novel. When 'Adam Bedè' was published there was no lack of persons who pronounced it immoral because the

great writer had shown the woeful consequences of woman's frailty. Had women ceased to be frail at the period when the fate of Hetty was told them ; and is it not rather certain that hundreds of women who read the sad, stirring lesson written for their warning have been withheld by it from going astray ? I cannot help wondering what would have been said if George Eliot had made Hetty's seducer a peer instead of a simple squire ; but in any case the outcry was loud enough, and it was just the sort of outcry which justifies the remark made by Théophile Gautier in a preface to one of his works : ‘*Quand il se trouve dans un livre un passage équivoque, il y a des esprits qui y courrent tout droit en grognant comme des pourceaux à la fange.*’

The same tendency was rebuked by Dr. Johnson, in his answer to the lady who congratulated him on there being no objectionable words in his dictionary. It is a tendency very common among a modern school of critics, and consists in damning a book on account of some particular passage or episode in it ; and that without taking account of the general drift of the author's work, and without recking whether the passage or episode in question has been introduced for the natural purpose of demonstration, or dragged in to excite an ill-regulated appetite in the reader. I am far from demanding on behalf of English novelists unlimited licence of

the sort which has been conspicuously abused by MM. Alexandre Dumas the younger and Ernest Feydeau, and by a living British authoress who has repeatedly described the boudoir-orgies of fallen women. When a critic finds an author doing that, or when he sees him go out of his way to fasten on some exceptional case of depravity, and gloat over its manifestations in sensuous, hysterical strains, he does his duty in putting his foot on such a propensity and stamping it down without quarter. I concede his right to do this as I do his right to censure the style of a book, the reality of its characters, or to controvert, in as strong language as he pleases, the soundness of the moral which the writer seeks to inculcate. But I altogether deny his right to prohibit an author from exposing in fit language a class of abuses or vices which they—both critic and author—know to be prevalent; but which divers interested persons would, for obvious reasons, rather not hear mentioned. Such a prohibition amounts to saying that when offenders go to certain lengths in criminality, the very foulness of their sins should exempt them from punishment; and it makes both author and critic abettors of the evils of which they know, but are afraid to divulge, on the principle *Invitat culpam qui peccatum praterit.*

At present, it is contended that breaches of the sixth and eighth commandments should alone find

place in a novel, but it is quite possible to conceive a state of society in which, owing to the peculations of a dominant faction, theft would become a very sore point. Indeed, whilst the 'Tammany Ring' held possession of New York, two theatrical managers in that city refused a comedy which satirised political dishonesty; and in 1856, when bubble companies were starting up all over France, M. Ponsard's powerful play *Bourse* stirred up against him the virulent abuse of newspapers which were connected with certain of the unscrupulous financiers of the day; some of whom, I may add, are at this writing in prison. Again, what if drunkenness ever became a pet vice among the upper classes, should a writer be restrained from showing up the degrading effects of drink because he might offend some influential personage addicted to tippling?

The question which a critic should candidly consider is, what are the proper functions of a romance-writer; and having myself reviewed many and many a work for the public press, I am inclined to speak from the principles which have always guided my judgments. Possibly, then, one of the highest functions of the writer is to point out the awful consequences of human error, and to trace some fault, for which, may-be, the world is too indulgent, from its first careless commission to its tragical

results. That was the design of the earliest and greatest masters of fiction. The more powerfully a situation like the above could be brought out, the more dramatic was the author's work and the greater chance it had of living through ages, as several works already enumerated in this Preface have lived.

When men commit crimes and to all seeming remain prosperous and happy, retaining the world's esteem, the real truth about them should be told. It should be explained by what tears of blood and anguish they redeemed themselves, and by what terrible punishments they were visited in secret. Moses offended by the bitter waters and was not allowed to see the promised land; David was not permitted to build the Temple; Solomon, the wisest of the wise, fell away, and his sins were expiated in cruel humiliation by his descendants. All these are records of human error, and were written for our instruction and consolation.

The world will not be bettered by saying that grocers give short weight, or that Mr. Income has fought Mr. Outcome in a gentlemanly manner for the leadership of a party and for 5,000*l.* a year. These are but small tricks and follies, and are of little consequence to mankind; but drama, pathos, and instruction begin where weak and sometimes good men commit heinous offences, as in the terrible

story of Royal Israel and the warrior whom he sent to death because his wife was very beautiful to look upon ; in the dark tales of Judah, and of Amnon, and of Lot. Has modern history no such examples ? Do not grievous rumours brood over crowns and coronets ? Simple folk who hear of evil doings and are not told what comes of them, deny God's justice, amazed and indignant that those who perpetrated deeds so nefarious should enjoy a fate apparently so fair.

Yes, if the world has slowly grown better than it was, if morals are on the whole purer now than they were in bygone centuries, we owe it much to the fact that authors of the past were not bound by the trammels with which it is sought to fetter their descendants. They scattered the truth fearlessly, therefore it yielded a harvest ; and sowers must not cease to scatter seed if they would have the earth go on bearing fruits of increase. Neither this generation nor the one after it will be the happier for being kept in the complacent belief that the wrongs which afflicted past ages have died out from among us. They must be told, on the contrary, that such and such sins do still exist, and they must be taught the iniquity, the foolishness, and the bitter price of them. Perhaps morals had reached the highest stage of purity in England during the two decades from 1840 to 1860 ; but it is a significant circumstance that the

general lowering in the tone of morality, public and private, the spread of extravagance, the taste for effeminate amusements, and the strange development of hypocrisy which have been of late discernible among us, tally with the period when journalists and novelists were first tied down to the inexorable law of 'saying nothing to scare people.' By such laws, authors, who should be our modern prophets, cease to resemble the inspired preachers who stood up to warn even kings of the wrath to come ; they are degraded to the rank of Simon the Sorcerer, and become mere priests of mysteries and tellers of lying fables.

I need not prolong these remarks, but will sum up by saying that the moral of 'Young Brown' is contained in its closing lines, 'Wisdom is justified of her children.' I have striven to illustrate the eternal law which verily governs the world, smiting down the guilty and taking wonderful cognizance of crimes committed with the applause or tacit sanction of mankind—crimes which are often beyond the jurisdiction of any earthly tribunal. In so doing I have hoped, if not to frighten the wicked, at least to console the good by the assurance that vice, though now and then outwardly triumphant, is never blessed, and that the practice of virtue is not so sterile as it seems.

I have not the presumption to endorse the opinion of the critics who called this book a great

one; but I leave it to the judgment of the reader, content with the motive which guided me in writing it, and not prepared to retract a single one of its lines.

THE AUTHOR.

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## BOOK I.

VOL. I.

B



## CHAPTER I.

### DUKE OF COURTHOPE.

SIR ODO-PLANTAGENET-CLANSGOLD-KINSGEAR-REVEL-WYLDWYL, K.G., Duke of Courthope and Revel, in the peerage of the United Kingdom ; Marquis of Oldmyth, Earl of Allswon, and Baron Partizan, in the peerage of Great Britain ; Earl and Viscount Kingsland in the peerage of Ireland ; Earl of Winguid, in the peerage of Scotland ; and a baronet, was naturally a great man before the first Reform Bill. He sent eleven Members to Parliament, and persons who owed everything to his patronage were to be found by those who sought after them, in every department of State. He had once condescended to accept the Vice-royalty of Ireland at the personal request of the Prince Regent, who liked to be splendidly represented ; and had been for a short time a member of a Courtier Cabinet, which had loyally paid some of his Royal Highness's debts ; but he

was too magnificent a personage to care for office. He was a leader of that mighty oligarchy which controlled successive Ministries, and no party chief would have ventured to form a government without counting on his support or forbearance. He left his nominees in the House of Commons to vote much as they pleased on questions affecting their private interests; but directly any measure was brought forward which concerned himself or the privileges of nobility in general, his Grace, and some dozen or two of his personal friends, issued orders for its immediate withdrawal, and marched a compact body of their retainers down to Westminster to see that the business did not go any further.

Neither the Duke, nor any of his political connections, were unkind men. They kept great state in their country houses. They went abroad with trains of carriages, and set the populace agape with awe. In an easy unaffected way, they exacted an awe-stricken respect from every one who approached them, just as they expected that even a beef-steak, which was their favourite dish, should be served to them on gold plate, by a footman in livery. Those who paid them in full, and without haggling, all the de-

ference they claimed as their birthright, had substantial reasons to be thankful for what they got in return. There was nothing out of the reach of the Wyldwyl influence. Places and pensions, bishoprics, commands in the army and navy, the enormously-paid sinecures of the law, and the best berths in the Civil Service, which was then called the Service of the Crown, were among the least of the good things which depended on their favour; and they could demolish troublesome people as easily as they could crack nuts. Every one who had dealings with them knew as a fact beyond dispute, and concerning which even question was in a manner inexpedient, that they could make their displeasure felt when crossed too boldly. The stocks and the pillory were still in existence. A man might be whipped at the cart's tail by a resolute judge; and even justices of the peace could do strange things. Appeals might be made to the higher courts of law by stubborn people, but they were always costly and seldom successful; for witnesses were to be publicly seen walking about in the neighbourhood of the Old Bailey, with straws in their shoes, as a sign that they were to be hired, and a democrat who persistently made himself dis-

agreeable and refused to mend his manners, might come to be hanged. The nobility were affable and condescending when amused, or indifferent; but not a few of them had shewn at odd times how sternly, and by what unscrupulous methods, they could avenge an affront without appearing openly in the matter. The sentiments of fear or gratitude they inspired, the universal servility with which they were treated by inferiors, did not depend on a slavish adherence to ancient custom: they were feelings based upon solid realities, and all sensible persons were aware that an abject subservience of the whims or interests of the hereditary masters of the country was the shortest way to wealth and honours. A nobleman could help or harm any inferior person whom he pleased, and if he meant to be mischievous, there was no escape from him at home or abroad. A private note sent out in a king's messenger's bag received as much attention from Prince Metternich and Prince Polignac, or from Count Nesselrode, the Duke of Couthrofiano and the Italian courts, as a letter marked 'confidential,' despatched by mounted express to Lord Grenville or Lord Liverpool. Somehow or other, by hook or by crook, disaffected

people, however cautious, got into difficulties and never got out of them. Noblemen were simply of opinion that the world, and all that in it is, was made for them, and nothing occurred for many years to shake their faith in that belief.

The Duke of Courthope, who lived at the close of the first quarter of the present century, had gone through the usual round of the pleasures and pains of a duke of the period. It was said that his youth had been wild ; but this, if it meant anything, could only be supposed to signify that he formerly was rich and light-hearted. Old Mr. Mortmain indeed, the family solicitor, would sometimes look grave when the stories of twenty years before were mentioned in his hearing ; a report had at one time been industriously circulated about a Scotch marriage and a daughter who had mysteriously disappeared, but who might, nevertheless, some day be proved heiress to the estates which mostly descended with the Scotch earldom of Winguid which his Grace had inherited from his mother. If that report were true the Duke had had no acknowledged children ; and it had been at one time rumoured that the young nobleman who passed as his son was his nephew. But this

rumour died out. The duke had been married by a prelate, whom he had placed on the Episcopal Bench, to Lady Mary Overlaw, sole heiress and representative of another duke, whose posterity were named as successors to the crown of England, under certain contingencies, by the will of Henry VIII.; and it was said in polite society, though it was not always said, that they had one son, a fine handsome young man with the family taste for enjoyment, who was lawful heir to the family honours. Other people, perhaps better informed, averred that the duchess never had a son at all. It did not matter much. The *Peerage* printed that there was a Duke of Courthope, and that was enough for polite society's purposes.

The bereaved widower did not take his wife's death much to heart; perhaps he was otherwise engaged, for there were many things which occupied his attention just then. He entertained Louis XVIII., and many of the French lords who followed him into exile, with such princely splendour that heavy charges on his property, and troublesome annuities, which subsequently inconvenienced his Grace considerably, began to take a vexatious shape about

this time. Also he contested several elections to keep the disciples of Hunt and Cobbett out of public life, as Members for constituencies which were disposed to show an awkward hankering after independence. Notably, one Brown, a Scotch merchant, who had made a fortune from very humble beginnings in the East Indies, opposed the duke's nominee for a family borough, with a rancour and bitterness which seemed to arise from personal antipathy. The violent goings-on of this Brown, who had impudently bought some land in the neighbourhood of one of the duke's estates, were at last mentioned to his Grace by a confidential agent charged with his election business ; but the duke evinced no desire to continue the conversation. The struggle, however, was protracted with such obstinacy, that Mr. Brown was half ruined, and had to set out again upon his travels to repair his damaged fortune. Then the duke smiled in a peculiar hard, wry way he had, drawing down one side of his handsome mouth, when he had taken a determination ; but he never visited the borough again, though all the shopkeepers in the place implored him to do so in the name of injured trade.

The latter years of his life were passed in retirement. He was old, he was gouty, and even poor. He never quite got over the political changes which occurred in 1831-2, and spoke of Lord Grey with great bitterness for having taken away so much of what belonged to him. The new power which had been set up in the State was money, and of that he had none at all. Mr. Brown came back, and turned his Grace's own uncle, Lord Rupert Wyldwyl, out of the ducal pocket borough of Skipworth, which pestilent town was built within a stone's-throw of his park gates. And what was worse, the Duke could no longer punish his tenantry, because he was in the hands of trustees, and his rents were assigned or anticipated. The past of but a short while ago, when he was all potent, seemed so far off that he sometimes doubted whether he had not dreamed that he once was great. He, who was now shelved and forgotten, while men spoke with bated breath of one O'Connell, an obstreperous Irishman, and a French Count D'Orsay whom he had good-humouredly patronised was king of Society. The only pleasure left to his Grace was that of cleaning his china, which connoisseurs esteemed

highly ; and feeding his peacocks who knew him, and perhaps sympathised with him, for they too were excluded from the state banquets of the sailor king, who had succeeded the tailor king. Once, when he went to London for a few days, a banker presumed to speak to him, the Duke of Courthope and Revel, a Knight of the Garter ! His Grace looked at the banker with a surprise almost pathetic, but the rich man was in no way impressed by it ; and whether it was this unheard-of impertinence, or the gout, or a constitution impaired by the dinners of Carlton House and the Pavilion, there soon afterwards appeared an article in 'The Times' which credited his Grace with all the virtues, and told a thoughtless world that he was dead. Possibly the virtues may have died with him, to show a becoming respect for the memory of the last of our great nobles.

## CHAPTER II.

## WAKEFIELD-IN-THE-MARSH.

IN the centre of a sleepy village on the borders of Oxfordshire there stood a small public-house, which was known to all the waggoners on the road for its sound beer and sweet hay. There were many waggoners about thirty-five years ago, and the 'Chequers,' which appeared from a large signboard, set in a clumsy framework upon a post, to be the sign of the inn, might have done a good business. But John Giles, the landlord, was for ever boozing with his customers on a bench before the door, and did not keep very clear accounts. He was a dull, good-natured fellow, who meant no harm to any one ; and after his wife died there was no one to see into his gains. If he had his dinner ready at one o'clock, and a brown jug of mild ale at his elbow all day, he thought there was no need to trouble himself about any-

thing else. A girl, who was said to be his wife's niece, kept these domestic arrangements in remarkably good order, and there was no one else on the premises but a contented ostler, who held his tongue whenever he could do so without offence, and did his work in a satisfactory manner, though not briskly ; for whatever he might happen to be about, his eyes seemed to be always wandering in search of the girl, who evidently gave him subjects of reflection too deep for words. His name was Tom Brown, and he too was a connection of the deceased landlady, for she had taken care to people the inn before her departure, though she left no children of her own. He came from Northumberland, and had a deal of north-country shrewdness under his stolid looks.

The girl was known as Madge Giles for every-day purposes. The curate, however, called her 'Miss Margaret,' and she laughed at him for doing so, but was secretly pleased ; it was pretty enough to see her come out demurely when he was likely to pass that way, and blush to hear herself treated with so much respect. All that was known with certainty about her, was that her mother had arrived

some nineteen years before at the 'Chequers' in a state of utter destitution, and had died soon after her birth. Such incidents are common enough among the poor, and if perhaps the gossips formed their own conclusions, the Giles's were decent folk, and there was no call to worry them with bad words about it. So the orphan child grew up to womanhood about the house, made herself useful, and John Giles, who was usually in a hazy state, thought that very likely she was a daughter he and his wife had had without knowing it. Madge called him father, and things were very well as they were. She was extraordinarily beautiful, and utterly ignorant ; a perfect type of bodily perfection uninformed by a mind ; an English peasant girl with no memory, no clear ideas about anything. She could recollect that there was a pudding for dinner last Christmas-day, and that she had fallen into the fire when a child ; but she could not remember anything that was said to her yesterday, unless it directly concerned herself. She could not read or write, or count up to twenty without blundering, and could not tell the way to the next town, though carts and coaches going thither passed the inn many times

daily. It would have been impossible to explain the commonest thing to her ; and she could not pronounce the name even of her friend the curate. She called him 't' parson,' whereas he appeared in the Clergy List as the Reverend Marmaduke Mowledy. She was a lovely animal, a laughing, singing, cooking, sewing animal ; and when Mr. Mowledy thought of her, as he very often did, he sometimes wondered whether we are all born with a soul, or whether we attain to a soul only through prayer and sorrow.

It was on a gusty afternoon, late in October, when woods are golden and every wind scatters its fairy treasure upon the earth, that a party of clowns were seated on the rustic benches before the road-side inn. They were drinking deep draughts of strong beer, and eating bread and bacon upon their thumbs. Now and then they threw a spare word to each other betweenwhiles, or a scrap of their food to the dogs who guarded their loads from tramps or gipsies, and who waited very intelligently and patiently, looking up at them with wistful eyes. From time to time a loud laugh went off among them like the crack of a waggoner's whip at some tale of the road ; but they were not a jocular set. When

they had eaten their supper they usually slouched off one by one, and with a prolonged ' Gee-wo, Dobbin ! ' to the leader of their team, went lumbering on their way. At last there only remained one or two steady topers, Harry Jinks the blacksmith, Mr. Joyce the sexton, and the landlord, whose minds and persons were constantly in soak, without appearing ever to get wet through. Night, sometimes so merciful, sometimes so full of pain and suffering and heavy with the birth of trouble, came slowly over the landscape. Cows and oxen were driven home from pasture, and one by one the lights began to shine in cottage windows. It was hardly a time to be abroad. The sun, after hiding itself all day, had fitfully broken out an hour ago, and left the sky red and angry. Dark clouds were rolling up in Titanic shapes from the west, and a few heavy drops of rain fell in the sullen manner which forebodes a storm.

Mr. Joyce, the sexton, a spare little man who seemed to have no room about him for the mighty tankards of ale he imbibed, and who looked so grave and respectable after he had disposed of them that people were inclined to believe some one else must have got tipsy in his

place, commenced fumbling first in the ample flaps of his broad black coat, and then in the pockets of an extremely narrow pair of drab breeches, but without result. His gaiters had no pockets; perhaps he thought he might find some in his hat, for he took it off with a puzzled air; but only a red and yellow cotton handkerchief fell out.

‘Ah,’ said Mr. Joyce, reflectively, ‘I do see how it be agin. My old ‘oman’s a took all the money, and a put un’ in her ould stockin’, that she have. Do ‘ee chark up three pints, Madge. I’ll pay next berryin’.’

‘That be noine pints as oi ha’ dra’ad fur ye, sexton, wi’ me own ‘ans, sin fower a clock,’ answered Madge, who came out in reply to his call. She was seldom asleep about a reckoning.

‘Noine pints, as I’m a mon, Mr. Joyce,’ roared the blacksmith. ‘So it be, wench; so it be.’

‘Noa, it bain’t,’ returned the sexton. ‘I ha’ drunk summut wi’ John Giles, fur company, but it don’t count. Do it, John?’

The landlord, being thus appealed to, tried for a few minutes to get at some understanding of the subject upon which his decision was

asked, but finding it all drowned, put down his pipe, that had gone out in the process, and stolidly let fall the words ‘nuff sed.’

‘John Giles doan’t a waste un’s talk, *he* doan’t, blacksmith ; he spakes to the pint, that he do. So I allus saith, an’ so doth parson,’ remarked Mr. Joyce, whose language had a faint Biblical flavour about it whenever he wanted to get decently out of a difficulty. Moreover, the rural mind is ever ready with a bit of flattery for a crony who has anything to give away, and it is quite a mistake to suppose that sycophancy is confined to the upper classes. John Giles liked figs as well as any king, and Mr. Joyce, having given him a sweet one, hobbled home, emitting a chuckle as heartfelt as escapes from the breast of an experienced courtier who has complimented the Prince of Monaco out of a place in his highness’s household. Whether such things are worth having, depends on the esteem in which a man holds beer and wine and small change.

The blacksmith rose with a yawn, stretched his great limbs, emptied his jug to the last drop, and prepared to follow the sexton, when he noticed something coming slowly down the lane

at a little distance. First it appeared like a red speck glancing through the trees, and behind it followed an object gaunt and shadowy, which dropped as it moved. The blacksmith had good eyes, and after watching these things for several minutes, he remarked to the ostler, who was looking after Madge, as he put away his pail for the night,—

‘There be wun of them there red coauts yonder, Tom, a leadin’ of a lame ’oss, which have a broak down, to my mind. Maybe ‘un on’y wants a shoe on, and I’ll go down an’ blow up the fire to make ready for ‘un. I’d as lief earn a shillin’ as not.’ And the blacksmith, thinking he had made a joke, gave out a laugh like the sound of a hammer upon an anvil.

On came the red-coat, with his horse toiling painfully after him, past the quiet mill, past the rectory, which had not been inhabited within living memory (the benefice to which it belonged being under sequestration, and the rector in the King’s Bench prison), past the church which stood close by, past the stagnant pond, and the pound, where a tinker’s donkey looked hungry and disconsolate enough. At last the dismounted

horseman stopped before the inn door, and as he did so the old signboard of the 'Chequers' creaked, as it swung on its hinges in the autumn wind, and the rain fell faster, as though the storm had burst through the cloud-gates that had hitherto restrained it.

'Ostler!' said the huntsman, in a pleasant but rather peremptory tone, 'put up this horse, he has sprung a sinew, and make him comfortable. Landlord, let me have a glass of your best ale, and I shall want a gig to go on to Dronington.'

The landlord repeated the word 'gig,' as who should say, 'It is all very well to want a gig, but where am I to find one?' and the rain lashed the road faster and faster.

Meantime, the huntsman had strode carelessly into the house, whip in hand, a splendid and noble figure of a man. He was tall and straight, with well-cut features, a colour fresh from health and exercise, and dark hair curling gracefully round his temples. He had flung himself on a wooden chair beside the kitchen fire, and was humming a tune in a clear strong voice, not unmusical, when Margaret Giles brought in some beer, and he looked up at her.

He drank a deep draught, for he was thirsty after a long day with the Cloudesdale hounds, which was the most famous pack in those parts ; then he fixed his large merry eyes again on the girl, and said, ‘ What’s your name, Mary ? ’

‘ Madge be moy neam, zur,’ replied the girl, blushing. ‘ It bain’t Mary, as I knows on.’

‘ Madge is a very pretty name,’ answered the huntsman, laughing, and showing a set of fine useful teeth ; when Tom Ostler put a stop to the conversation, and pulling his hair in front as a token of respect, though he did not seem to welcome the stranger’s arrival very cordially, he addressed the huntsman in this wise :

‘ Master do say as how ye do want a gig, zur ? ’

‘ Ah,’ replied the stranger, good-humouredly, and apparently recollecting something he had forgotten. ‘ Yes, I want a gig. Put to at once, will you ? ’

‘ We arn’t got no gig,’ remarked Tom Ostler, with visible reluctance, ‘ but there’s a waggon not fur down the road as allus stops a bit at the “ Barley Mow,” ’bout two mile on. Ye can catch ’un up, zur, if ye run for’t.’

‘Thank you,’ answered the huntsman, throwing himself back in his chair, with an amused yawn. ‘I can’t run after a waggon, but you can fetch it back on your shoulders, and Madge can make me up a bed there.’ He laughed more after this, and his laughter was so joyous that Madge laughed too, and Tom Ostler grinned, wondering what it was all about. He did not understand how anybody could see the fun of sleeping in a waggon while there was a dry hayloft, but he did not say so, because his words had got rusty from disuse and would not come out of him easily.

The huntsman, finding Tom did not move, but stood staring at him and Madge, walked whistling towards the window and looked out. It was quite dark, and the storm now raged with the fury of an equinoctial gale. Behind him was the ruddy glow of the inn fire, and Madge, who was busy getting ready the landlord’s supper. It had a hungry smell, that supper, and the huntsman began to think a good deal about it. Presently he turned round sharply, cast an impatient glance at Tom Ostler, tapped the devil’s tattoo on the small diamond-shaped panes of the inn windows, and then

asked Madge if he could have a fire in a private room, some dinner, and a bed for the night.

What was it possessed the girl as she answered, mechanically, 'Yes?' She felt frightened after she had said it. No traveller had ever before required a dinner and a bed at the 'Chequers,' but it was a large rambling house, and there were several spare rooms which were never wanted. She could light a fire in one of them, and put some clean sheets, of which she had a large store, on a bed in another. It was not very hard work to set about this, and the stranger would be gone next morning. Her idea of a dinner was eggs and bacon with fried eels, which were plentiful about there, and potatoes. It is not a very bad one. There were half-a-dozen flitches hanging in the inn kitchen, plenty of eggs, and live eels enough and to spare in the tank; so an hour later the handsome gentleman, comfortably housed and fed, was dozing before a fire of his own, with his boots off and his slippered feet upon the fender.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE ROADSIDE INN.

THE blacksmith had ordered another jug of beer to moisten gossip, and had sat down to supper with John Giles, to talk about the stranger and his horse.

‘I have heered,’ said the blacksmith, reverentially, ‘that such big blood ’osses as that there yonder do cost a’most a fortin.’

‘Depends on what ‘ee call a fortin,’ remarked John Giles, who had a dusty recollection that some one had told him his brewers were worth a hundred thousand pounds. ‘A yoss can’t cost a fortin, Harry.’

‘He do,’ replied Mr. Jinks, firmly; ‘my brother noo a mon as lived down away somewheres in Leicestershire, and as told ‘un as how Sir Francis Burdett paid a matter o’ seven hundred pound for a yoss they called “Samson:” he worn’t such a strapper as this one, by all

accaents,' and the blacksmith hit the table with a thump. Every one talked of Sir Francis Burdett in those days, and his name was a household word from one end of England to the other.

‘Why, that there ‘oss’s shoes an’ his saddle an’ bridle cost as much as I earns in six months,’ continued the blacksmith after a pause.

‘You earns a good bit in six months,’ returned the landlord, unable to grasp a fact so unfamiliar to his experience. ‘A bit of iron an’ a scrap of pigskin can’t be wuth much.’

‘Them there shoes be made of gun-barr’ls, they be ; an’ the saddles come all the way from Ingry,’ said the blacksmith, who was unwilling to relinquish a marvel when he had got fairly hold of it, and liked to make it as wonderful as possible, just as he made a shapely shoe with his hammer and tongs.

Madge sat in a corner of the inn kitchen drinking in these words, and the blacksmith, becoming conscious, by the magnetic influence of sympathy, that he had a willing listener somewhere in the neighbourhood, would have held forth much longer ; but a steady series of snores, which began about this time to issue from the

landlord, put him out in his narrative. The candle flared low in its socket at the same time, and warned him it was growing late ; so he said 'good-night,' and went home to bed. John Giles, being then awakened by the sudden silence, got up, rubbed his eyes drowsily, and having muttered something about nine o'clock, toddled off to rest also.

The girl sat some time longer by the kitchen fire, thinking of she knew not what, but thinking very deeply. It was years afterwards that she became conscious of the thoughts which had passed through her mind as she sat that night with her neglected needlework in her lap, her eyes fixed on the pictures which grew out of the living coals, and which perhaps first aroused her torpid fancy. She must have been sitting there more than an hour when Tom Brown, with a lantern in his hand, thrust himself half through the doorway, and breathed hard. But the girl, apparently unaware of his presence, did not move, so absorbed was she in her waking dream. What had come over her since the morning ? She seemed far away from him ; there was something strange and distant in her manner, like that of one who belonged to another order of

creation ; and the honest fellow became conscious of an inferiority he had never felt before. Still there was an infinite tenderness on his face which refined his coarse features, and gave an untaught grace to his movements, as he cautiously approached her, unwilling to intrude so mean a thing as himself upon her thoughts ; but presently he spoke, and though what he said was very homely, his voice sounded kindly and firm, as that of a protector who would shield her from harm with his life, if needs were.

‘ I be fur to carry summut writ on peeaper into toun yonder,’ said Tom.

‘ Be ye ? ’ answered Madge, impassively, and still looking at the fire.

‘ It be fur him as be upstairs,’ continued Tom, jerking in that direction with his thumb ; ‘ an’ it be matter o’ a dozen mile on end. I sharn’t be back afore marnin’.’

‘ It bain’t no odds,’ said the girl, still motionless and absent-minded.

‘ Ye bain’t afeerd, be ye, Madge ? ’ inquired Tom, putting down his lantern. ‘ If ye be, I wun’t go. On’y say the word, I wun’t go.’

‘ What shud oi be feerd on ? ’ answered the girl, angry at being disturbed in her reverie.

‘Nought as I knows on,’ replied Tom, scratching his head, as though unconvinced by his own reasoning ; and he passed into the darkness outside. The sound of his clumsy steps, as he plashed through the storm, were heard for a few minutes, and then all was still, save the monotonous ticking of the Dutch clock on the kitchen wall, the chirp of the cricket on the hearth, and the hum of silence in the air.

Madge then remembered that she had not cleared away the stranger’s dinner, and went to do so. She found him fast asleep in a large arm-chair, which had not been filled since her foster-mother’s death. The dying embers smouldered in the grate, and the candles gave a fitful light as they burnt down in their sockets. She did not like to wake the sleeper, and stood for some time irresolute whether to stay or go away. The splendid appointments of a gentleman of fashion, belonging to a generation somewhat more magnificent than that which has succeeded it, were scattered carelessly about the room. The massive handle of his hunting-whip shone like pure gold, and the lash, which trailed along the oaken floor, was as white as a streak of snow. He had cut off the feet of his hunting-

boots to make slippers, and thrown the tops aside. There they lay in the coal-scuttle, with their glittering silver spurs tossed all awry beside them. A gold watch, richly chased with a coronet and cipher in brilliants, and a massive chain, were on the mantel-piece, and it seemed to Madge as if these brilliants were drops of water. She tried noiselessly to wipe them off, and found that they were hard. Then she remembered that she had heard of diamonds, which were said to be of inestimable value, and she looked at them with a girl's curiosity, turning them in the light and marvelling at their flashes. She was very near to him now, but he did not wake. One of his feet rested on the fender ; the other was flung over an arm of the chair, and its slipper had dropped off. She had never seen such small feet, and she noticed, with a woman's eye for finery, that the stockings on them were of white silk. Still he slept on, and she grew bolder. She went to the table to see what he had eaten, and found to her astonishment that the fried bacon was left untouched, and that he must have managed his eels with a fork, for the knives were all quite clean. Then she looked again to see if he

were yet awake, but he slept on, and she became fascinated as she looked. He was very stately and handsome, with his scarlet coat and pearl grey waistcoat, and the blue silk neckerchief half untied about his neck. His long hair, black as a raven's wing, and worn in love-locks according to the fashion of the day, fell over a forehead white as ivory, and the rings on one of his hands, which drooped negligently beside him, glanced and sparkled like living things. The girl was spell-bound, and she could hear the beating of her own heart as she stood there, afraid to stay, afraid to go away, and by-and-by afraid to move.

If any observer, impressed with the theory of race, had been at the 'Chequers' inn that night, he would have been struck by a certain resemblance which might be traced between this village girl and the young huntsman. He was dark, and she was fair; but there was a likeness in their features: the same short upper lip and almond-shaped purple eye; the same full, well-cut mouth and strong cheek, with a peculiar dimple on the chin, which was rather soft and weak in its outline. They had even the same tones in their voices, and the same

tricks of movement. They had both the same small, haughty head, which they threw back at times in the same way ; the same shapely hands and feet, the same nervous limbs. The finer generations of animals resemble each other in this way ; why should not the finer generations of men and women ? For, after all, their resemblance was only that which a noble work of art, brought to the highest pitch of perfection, may bear to another work of art equally finished ; and yet this young man and woman, who would have seemed to a sculptor as ideal types of a splendidly matched pair, were a peer of England and a poor peasant maid.

At length the sleeper stirred uneasily in his chair, as though some careless dream had disturbed him, and he woke abruptly.

‘ What, Madge, my girl ! ’ said he, passing one of his jewelled hands over those bright eyes of his. ‘ Why, what’s o’clock ? I am afraid I have kept you out of bed to an unconscionable hour. By Jove ! I declare it is nearly midnight. Bring me a candle, my dear.’

She did not understand what he said to her. Her only idea was to escape, and she hurried away trembling. But he followed her, and

caught her by the hand. ‘Madge, Madge!’ he said. ‘You little bolter, what is the matter?’ And, for the first time, the stranger eyed Madge with some of that complacency which Grand Turks are accustomed to bestow on maidens whom they delight to honour, and which was imitated pretty successfully in their dealings with country chamber-maids by the young nobles of forty years ago.

She turned her eyes away from him at last, and felt ready to cry. He released her, and she felt vexed and ashamed of herself.

‘Fetch me another candle, my dear,’ he said coolly, ‘and show me my bedroom. I must be up and away early.’

She had never thought of that. She would have run a mile in the rain barefooted rather than return to him, yet she thought of his going away with a sharp pang at the heart.

The Stranger observed this, for indeed he had a sharp eye in all that concerned the weaknesses of the adverse sex towards himself. He smiled, not unflattered that he should have brought down an inn-maid at a glance, neither more nor less than a titled lady at Almack's. Then he drew her near to him composedly,

glided his arm round her waist and said : ' What a pretty girl you are, Madge ! you must make the fortune of such a place as this. I give you my honour if I were a bumpkin I should be tippling stout downstairs all day so as to have it drawn by you.' He laughed with a gallantry which would have transported a countess, lifted her chin with his forefinger, and pressed a light kiss on her cheek. She quivered from head to foot, disengaged herself from his embrace with a stifled cry, and fled.

## CHAPTER IV.

## DREAMS.

Poor girl! one of the many who have thought they could take care of themselves! What had she done that a whirlwind should sweep over her young life in this fashion? but for the matter of that, what has the wild rose-bud done, which has asked of God nothing but a little dew and a ray of sunlight, and which the first gale blows torn and soiled into the clay? Madge had that rough knowledge of right and wrong which may lurk inborn in those who have been never preached to and never taught. She would have defended herself against the rude courtship of ploughboys or the ambiguous jests of tipsy pedlars; but where was the training that could have steeled her against a being who was as unlike the other men she had ever seen as day is opposite to night—a being who had paralyzed her faculties as lightning might do, blinding all

her perceptions of good and evil, and leaving her no power of reflection or resistance? His voice was softer and sweeter than any woman's she had heard; his eyes were a magic in themselves; the practical arts of a wooer were so familiar to him that he could fill a poor girl's head with fancies as intoxicating as new-pressed wine. In struggles like these the conditions of the contest are not even. When Education is pitted against Ignorance, Craft against Simplicity, Strength against Weakness, heaven alone can help the fallen.

That night, when everybody else in the house slept, Madge crouched in the darkness near the empty grate of the kitchen. The wind moaned weirdly outside as if in pain; the windows creaked in their leaden frames and the falling of the rain continued, ceaseless, monotonous and hard. But Madge was absent from all present sights and sounds, and fell into a kind of trance which was neither sleep nor waking. Why was it that for the first time in her life she now thought of her mother, and tried to recall an image she had never seen from out of the shadows that thickened round her? In the churchyard there were tombs and over the

tombs grew flowers, and when the spring breezes gently stirred the waving trees, white blossoms fell in handfuls over the grassy mounds, whilst birds sang above as if nothing but joy and peace could inhabit the garden which old men call God's acre. And the parson said these graves were simply resting places where the weary lay in quiet till Christ came and led them by the hand to a kingdom where there was no labour and no sorrow. She wondered whether her mother was an angel and talked about her with the other angels, all in pure robes and crowned with gold ? If she could only see her mother once—for a single instant—she who had never known a mother, she could whisper to her—something ! For God would believe her mother. If He was angry with *her* now He would know that angels can only speak the truth, and for her mother's sake He would take from her heart the load he had just put there, and which was crushing her —He alone knew how cruelly ! Disjoined fragments of prayers came back to her recollection, prayers of which she had never before comprehended the meaning : 'Our Father.'

‘O God our Heavenly Father.’ . . . God was something more than God then, and the punisher of sinners ; he was Father ! She staggered to her feet, stretched her hands in front of her and wailed : ‘Mawther, mawther ! tell him it was none moy fault ! He knows it wasn’t’—then fell forward on her knees with her face against the ground and sobbed pitifully. . . .

Hours passed, and she had crept again near the fender, with her limbs numbed, her body trembling, and her fevered head resting on her curved arm. But the mists had somehow cleared. A soft music of bells rippled through summer air ; there was a fragrance of roses ; the bells sounded nearer ; and birds soared chirping towards a sky so blue, bright and warm ! The church was before her ; its doors stood open, and crowds were hurrying in, but they were not men and women. The graves seemed to have given up their sleepers, and spotless troops of angels, with the smiles of children, beckoned her to follow them to an altar shining with lights more than could be numbered. Then hymns uprose, first murmured, then slowly and sweetly swelling till they filled the

church. Then other angels appeared with branches and lilies, which they strewed upon her path ; and an unseen hand took hers and drew her to the altar where she had seen brides led, and where now awaited her with a beam of welcome the man who had fired her poor desolate soul with the passion of love. . . . She would have flung herself in his arms, but something restrained her, and they knelt together—she pledging herself to be faithful and obedient to him ; he vowing to love, honour, and guard her all his days. And the while the bells chimed merrily, the organ pealed its holiest notes ; and she, looking at herself, saw that she was arrayed in white like the others, for God had clothed her in his garb of innocence. . . .

How long she lay in that unconscious state, which is part death, part life, she could never guess ; but during weeks and months afterwards she continued to start in her sleep, mingling the visions of this one fateful night with the indistinctly remembered reality. When she recovered her senses the darkness had faded. Two oblique rays of light were falling through

the openings in the shutters ; the wind had lulled, and the rain outside had ceased. A large cat, which had been prowling about in search of mice, started at her first movement and rushed away with a clatter over the coals in a corner, causing her to sit up on the ground terrified, and to utter a scream. But nobody heard her ; and she pressed her hands to her aching forehead, to recollect where she was, and why she had come there. All she evoked was a dull throbbing at the temples : and she found her limbs cramped and racked with pain. Mechanically she rolled up a tress of her hair which had fallen loose over her shoulders, and incoherently repeated to herself snatches of the things she had dreamed, trying to sift them from the facts which had really happened. The effort was too much for her confused brain, unaccustomed to reason save on things actual and visible, and too weak to reflect much even on them. A stupefied and bewildered expression settled on her face ; and there she remained sitting and hearkening tremulously to every sound, till she heard the first waggoner on the road draw up his team and shout for breakfast.

It must have been nearly six o'clock in the morning then, for, upon the extreme edge of the horizon, towards the river, the autumn dawn broke dim and grey ; and the waggoner complimented her for being afoot and about so early.

## CHAPTER V.

MR. SHARPE.

It may have been some two hours after this, that is about eight o'clock, when there was a great commotion in the village. It was caused by the arrival of a four-horse coach, on which were seated five people; and such a coach and such people had seldom been seen in those parts before. It was a glittering painted thing with a dark blue body, almost black, and red wheels. It was drawn by three thoroughbred chestnuts and a grey. The grey went a little tender on his off fore foot, but made a smart appearance nevertheless. The horses had rosettes and streamers at their ears, and their harness jingled grandly as they tossed their heads and snorted along the road, lifting their knees up to their noses. They were driven by a shrewd-looking man, of some five-and-thirty years old, very clean built, and tight about the

legs. He might have been a feather-weight when he was young, and now weighed at most eight stone. He was dressed in black from top to toe, save for a white neckerchief very neatly folded, confined by a horseshoe gold pin, and a scarlet under-waistcoat.

On the hind seat were two grooms, like the servants out of livery belonging to a great establishment. They wore short black coats, white cravats, buckskin breeches and top-boots. They had cockades in their hats, which then really betokened that their master was an officer of the Crown, and they were as neat as new pins upon a fair-day. The fourth person was an impudent lad, dressed in a drab jacket and overalls, with a Scotch cap on his head. He had a complete suit of horse clothing beside him, marked with a duke's coronet and the cypher 'C & R.' He sat on the seat behind the driver, and amused himself by squinting and making faces.

Beside the driver on the box was a fat, oily man, who used a great deal of pomatum, and whose garments of many colours sat stiffly upon him, as though they had come straight from the tailor's. The small tips of his large jean

boots were varnished, his white hat was glossy. He was varnished and glossy all over. His gloves were white and tight, his outside coat was white and loose, his inner coat was blue, with gilt buttons. There were two monstrous pins in his long flowered satin cravat, and chains of gold, fresh burnished, dangled all about him. He held a cane, with an agate knob surrounded by garnets, in his great-coat pocket.

The coachman, who handled his cattle very neatly, brought them cleverly up before the inn door, and one of the grooms behind, swinging briskly down from his seat as they stopped, ran a few steps, touched his hat, from habit, for there was no one near and called out sharply, 'Is the Dook——?'

'All right, Bill,' said the stud groom on the box, for that was the rank he held in a nobleman's household. 'His Grace is here. There's the big bay hoss shaking hisself among the ducks an' geese. Hi ! girl, bring us some rum and milk. The wench looks like a ghost.'

This last observation was addressed to Madge, who stared at the glittering equipage with feelings only known to herself.

The fat man in the white coat now descended

nervously from the box, making his foot-hold ludicrously secure at every step, puffed himself out, put the knob of his cane in his mouth thoughtfully, and strutted into the inn parlour. Then he strutted out again, having found nothing.

‘Where’s the Duke’—he had just begun to say with some importance, when the stud groom glanced quietly down from the box at him, and observed in an under-tone, ‘There’s his Grace looking out at yer from the winder, Mr. Sharpe.’

The fat man seemed to grow smaller when he heard this, and his smug features put on an air of precipitate humility. He took off his shiny hat with a cringing air and bowed to the ground, while the young huntsman of the day before called to him in tones of astonishment and displeasure, not unmixed with anxiety, ‘Hullo, Sharpe, I thought you were at Doncaster. I told you to go yesterday.’

‘Game’s up, your Grace. Tipster’s lot had cut the grass under my feet.’

‘The devil they had. They must have used a scythe then, and I lose thirty thou’ again with you confounded bookmakers. William,

send up Lafleur with my clothes, and keep the team moving. I shall be down in an hour.'

'All right, your Grace,' answered the man on the box, touching his hat. 'Mr. Sharpe, wake up Mussheer Leflore inside, will you, and tell the Frenchman to be off with the Dook's traps, or we shall have something at our 'eds from that there winder in a jiffy.'

Mr. Sharpe, thus adjured, went hastily to the coach window, and bawled 'Moussoo Lefloor' till the startled valet roused himself, and presently emerged with a carpet-bag, a dressing-case, and an india-rubber folding bath, with which he went upstairs. He was a very dignified gentleman, and looked like a minister of state got up for an 'at home.'

'I say, Mr. Sharpe,' now remarked the stud groom in a low voice, flicking something off the near leader's ears with his whip, 'we've bin and gone and hit the Dook precious hard this time, at Doncaster.'

'A still tongue makes a wise head, William,' said the fat man, lighting a fat cigar.

'What do I clear by the fluke, Mr. Sharpe?' asked the stud groom, ruminating. 'I've been a-thinkin' a good deal about that there public

down at Epsom, since you put me up to it, and promised as how you would winter yer runnin' 'osses there.'

'Never mind about the public just yet. That'll keep, that will, William. You've got a good place, haven't you? Well, then, slow and sure, that's yer motter.'

'I don't complain, Mr. Sharpe; though the Dook don't pay up as he might do, drat him! The young beggar owes me a year an' a 'alf's wages, an' there ain't no signs of his munney, as I sees. If it warn't for the corn-chandler and the saddler I should not have been able to put the pot on at the Derby this year, nohow. The coach-builder do say, says he, he won't give neither me nor Sam a rap till he gets his own brads.'

'He be blowed,' said Mr. Sharpe. 'Go to my man, Riquetti, in Long Acre. He knows it's all right till I tell him it ain't. The young 'un must have some more wheels when he goes to town, and you can tell him Growler's things don't run light enough. He's sure to bite at that. None of them chaps could hold their nags together if they had a four-wheel furniture van behind 'em, but they're allis agog for light traps.'

‘I don’t say no, Mr. Sharpe, and the dodge isn’t so hard to try, is it? His Grace b’leaves anythink a’most as I tells him. It ain’t very diffickult to ’umbug him. But the grey mare she won’t quite do, she won’t.’

‘Why not?’ sneered Mr. Sharpe. ‘You got your commission from Coper, didn’t you?’

‘Yes, I did, Mr. Sharpe, and, in coorse, many thanks to you for that an’ all favers. Only Lord George he was a-talking to the Dook about her last Wednesday was a week; and a nod is as good as a wink. No offence, I hope, Mr. Sharpe?’

‘Oh, dear, no, William. But what did Lord George say to his Grace about the grey?’

‘His lordship said she warn’t much good, unless for cat’s-meat—that he did, Mr. Sharpe.’

‘And what did his Grace answer?’

‘Oh, says his Grace, says he, I knows that very well, but old knife-blade won’t do a bit of stiff for nuthink; and I thought he meant you, so I tells you on it, Mr. Sharpe. You got me my place, and I ham in dooty bound so for to do.’

‘Put stockings under her shoes, William,’ answered Mr. Sharpe. ‘She’ll go even enough

till the Dook wants another, and then, why you'll always find Coper ready with a five-pound note a leg. That'll do, won't it ?'

'That'll do, Mr. Sharpe : but yer see the mare jibs ; and when they goes a bit okkerd, the Dook gets hold of the whip, and, my eye, how he do pay it into 'em, and hollers, he do, enuff to scare a flock o' sheep. We shall capsize all on us some day, and I might just fall a bit heavy, you knows, Mr. Sharpe.'

'Take off her bearing-rein, William, and put the other up to the cheek. Keep the whip away from his Grace at startin', and take care the boys give her her head.'

The conversation went on in this strain for some time, while the drag was moving slowly up and down before the roadside inn, till the huntsman's bedroom window was thrown open again, and M. Lafleur, in broken English, ordered one of the grooms, who were lounging against the sign-post, to call the coach, as his Grace was coming down.

During these proceedings Madge Giles had gone about the house like one stupefied by a narcotic. She could not realize anything that had happened within the last twelve hours, and

did not know whether she was waking or sleeping. Mr. Sharpe had tried, with coarse familiarity, to joke with her, but she took no notice of him, and did not seem even to hear what he said.

Poor Madge did not hide herself and seek for rest, though her knees were weak and her eyes haggard. It is only the rich who can give way to their feelings in the privacy of a comfortable apartment, where cambric handkerchiefs are kept ready for tears, and a down pillow for an aching head. She had to light the kitchen fire and get breakfast ready, to sweep the house and feed the fowls ; and she went about these duties, though her lip quivered with suppressed anguish and her heart felt heavy enough to burst her breast.

If she could only see *him* once more, thought the unhappy girl, she might bear her burthen better ; but of that there seemed small chance. Directly the French valet had entered his room she was cut off from him as completely as if they were miles apart. One or other of the top-booted grooms was always running up and down the staircase, now with pails of cold water for the bath, now with jugs of hot water,

now with boots and brushes ; and all these things had to be taken down again and repacked in the coach, so that perpetual motion was going on at the roadside inn.

Towards nine o'clock, however, the bedroom door was dashed open with a bang, and a quick elastic step cleared the stairs two at once. It must be he who had stolen away her very self. She raised her hot red eyelids, which had been cast down before, and looked timidly out from the kitchen door. He was talking to Mr. Sharpe, with his back turned towards her, and she hardly knew him at first, he was so changed. He wore a dark-blue frock-coat, closely buttoned, a high napless white hat, and trousers of yellow cord. She had seen the uniform of the Cloudesdale hunt before, but she had never seen such a dress as this. She feared he had gone away as mysteriously as he came, till he turned round and smiled at her ; and then she looked at him with one glance of mute appeal that was almost terrible in its pathos. Her face was of an ashen white, her mouth was parted, and the underlip drooped sorrowfully.

But the wild mournful look of the girl, so fearful in its silent misery, fell unheeded on the

callous noble. He patted her in a merry mood upon the cheek, and said gaily, 'Madge, my pretty maid of the inn, pick me a flower for my button-hole as a keepsake.'

There were some honeysuckles and late monthly roses in the inn garden, a legacy from the wealth of departed summer. She picked a rose-bud for him and held it out with a hand parched by fever. He had already taken the reins when she brought it, and as he tried to put it in his breast, the leaders moved impatiently, and the rosebud fell broken to the ground. He had given her something as he took the flower from her. She did not know what it was. The next moment he was on the box.

'Let them go, boys,' he shouted, and the grooms jumped away from the horses' heads. The grey mare backed and kicked viciously at the splinter-bar.

'Give her her head, your Grace,' said Mr. William, the stud groom, quickly, and Mr. Sharpe clutched nervously at the rail of his seat.

'Where's the whip, William?' asked the Duke, losing his temper.

It's slipped down behind your Grace,' said Mr. William, who had purposely dropped it. 'Tom, look alive, and fetch his Grace's whip, can't you?' One of the boys, who had just climbed up behind, winked to the other, thrust his tongue in his cheek, and threw himself down. Mr. William pretended he could not reach the whip, when the boy held it towards him, and swore some quaint stable oaths, which put the Duke in a good humour. Just then, too, the leaders started off with a rush, and went over the hills and far away at a hand-gallop.

Madge gazed wistfully after the drag as it disappeared, and then, going up to her own room, she locked herself in, and cried with an exceeding great and bitter cry.

## CHAPTER VI.

## DESERTED.

MADGE was not seen again till late in the afternoon, when the inn had resumed its usual aspect. Honest Tom Brown, wondering at her absence, and the cold dinner without potatoes which was the inevitable result of it, could not get rid of an uneasy notion that something had occurred which was unknown to him. But he was an ignorant and inarticulate fellow, not a chatterbox even in his cups, of which he drank but few, and, having been up all night, he was not altogether sorry for an excuse to lie down in the hayloft, and have a good sleep. He was tired with his twenty-four miles' walk to Dronington and back, tired with watching for her fruitlessly, and when he got up she was about again. She did not indeed speak to him, or to anybody else, and she looked as if she had been crying ; but since yesterday he could not

muster up courage to talk to her. So he mooned about in and out of the house, and backwards and forwards to the stables, thinking that all would come right in good time—an axiom with which many a dull man has been fain to comfort himself under dismal circumstances.

In the stable was the tall bay hunter; and the mite of a boy in a drab jacket and overalls, who had been rubbing its sprained leg and bandaging it by turns since morning. He had also swathed the horse up to its eyes in the clothing he brought with him, and having drank about a gallon of strong ale, the small boy and the big horse were about to set off together.

‘He’s still lame as he was afore, old stick-in-the-mud,’ remarked the small boy to Tom Brown; ‘but I’ve prummissed my old ’oman to be ’ome for supper—so we’re off, and Red Rover can get hisself right arterwards.’

‘Ye mawn’t go miscallin’ your mawther that loike,’ said Tom Brown.

‘My old ’oman ain’t my muther, now then, stoopid,’ answered the boy, indignantly. ‘She’s my missus.’

‘Ye bain’t above a matter o’ ten year old,

an' ye got a missus?' asked Tom Brown in much amazement.

'I'm risin' sixteen; fifteen last selliger,' said the boy. 'I knows it, cos it's the big day at Doncaster.'

Tom Brown subsided after this information, though probably his private opinion was not much altered by it, and presently the short boy, who might have been any age between twelve and fifty, if judged from his appearance when closely examined, led out the tall horse and prepared to set off upon his journey.

'Who be yure maister, and wheer do 'un live?' inquired Tom Brown, with friendly interest, as they took leave of each other.

'Walker, up a street,' said the boy, trying his latest acquirement in squinting; and tucking the horse's bridle under his arm, he began whistling 'Nancy Dawson,' and went about his business with the lame horse hobbling after him.

Nothing happened for many days after this at Wakefield-in-the-Marsh. It was a lost, out-of-the-way place, lying twelve miles from the nearest market town of any importance. The land in the neighbourhood, which was not very good for agricultural purposes, belonged to two

or three great proprietors, and the sub-agents who collected their rents lived at Dronington. The inn was the best house in the village, and there was not a person in it but the curate, Mr. Mowledy, who ever subscribed to a newspaper or read a book. Even Mr. Mowledy had been for some time away in the north, and his duty was performed by a hasty parson, who rode over from Dronington at a brisk canter every Sunday, and kept his horse waiting at the 'Chequers' while he hurried through a single service. It did not much matter : there were seldom more than half a score of bumpkins, chiefly old, who went to church at all, and they understood nothing of Mesopotamia, about which this hasty parson preached to them from an old mouse-eaten stock of sermons he found at the rectory. The rector himself had been a hard-riding, six-bottle man, who had got into debt and disgrace. He had not seen his parishioners since his insolvency, and had never at any previous period concerned himself with their education or culture ; and Mr. Mowledy received but 60*l.* a year for filling one of the richest benefices in England as best he could upon so meagre a stipend.

There was none of the frightful poverty of populous cities, no hideous beggary with unheeded sores at Wakefield. The people did well enough, and got plenty to eat and drink. They had a very prolific breed of ducks and geese, which they sent with butter and eggs to market once a week. Most of them had a pig and a cow ; those who had not, worked contentedly for those who had. But there was probably not a more ignorant or ill-taught place in England. Long ago Mr. Mowledy had tried his hand at a school ; but the blacksmith, Mr. Jinks' father, and the wheelright, who led the community, did not care to take their children from work to learn their letters ; and John Giles, of the 'Chequers,' knew that Madge had too much to do at home to go dangling after the parson's heels. So by-and-by all hope and ambition, perhaps all desire to improve his cure from that point of view, died out of Mr. Mowledy's mind, and he let things take their ancient, immemorial course.

He came back from the north a little older and more dejected than he went ; for his brother and only relative, who had held a small living on the borders of Northumberland as locum-

tenens for the patron's son, had died during his absence ; but there was no apparent change in him. He preached wearily twice every Sunday, and once on Wednesday evenings, after his return, and his spare congregation was increased by Madge ; who looked very pale and thin, but listened to him reverently without understanding much of his discourse.

He soon noticed the girl's regular attendance on his ministry ; and the heart of the lonely man warmed towards her. He had scarcely more than the wage of a servant ; he had no prospects of advancement, no respect for himself now. He could not ask any lady to share his penury, and if he could do so he knew of no one to ask. He might, however, take Madge to his comfortless cottage, if she would go. She was a busy housewife, and would make him a good helpmate. There would be nothing to shock her feelings, or estrange her heart in his meagre fortunes. He would love her very dearly, and she would make his home bright with her presence. The girl had good natural abilities. She might be taught enough book-learning to make her a pleasant companion upon winter's evenings when their work was done. He knew

she was thrifty and sweet-tempered. He only forgot that he was forty-nine years old and she not twenty.

It was one evening early in November that he spoke to her first. He even fancied she was waiting for him, and looked kind welcome from her large, soft, purple eyes ; but that could only be imagination, overwrought by solitude. The hoar frost was on the ground, and the landscape seen from the stile near the village church, where he met her, was very tranquil and lonely. There was a path that led on through some meadows to the rectory, beside which stood his own forlorn lodging ; it had been built by a former more prosperous incumbent for his gardener. He walked beside Madge through these fields, where the blackbird sang his loud good-night, and the wren and the speckled thrush were busy with the hedge-berries. It was she who spoke first, and she asked him, in a sweet, grave voice, if he would write a letter for her.

Mr. Mowledy, though surprised at this request, promised readily to do so, thinking in his own mind that it might refer to some brewer's or distiller's account which was overdue, and then he walked silently on beside her. He was

a learned man, was Mr. Mowledy, and had taken honours at his college. He might have done well in the world if he had had more energy, or less conscience. But he let one opportunity after another glide by him in the race of life, and never overtook them or tried to do so. And here now was this gentleman and scholar abashed in the company of a village girl. If she had cared for him, if he had met such a woman once in the heyday of existence when his blood was young, if even yet she had felt or could have felt one spark of love for him, he might have been helped out of his difficulty. A word or a look would have done it, and the pent-up tenderness of his gentle heart would have overflowed. But most girls are cruel where they are indifferent. Their eyes are closed, their ears are deaf to the concerns of all except those who can win their affections; and Providence has willed it so in mercy to mankind, that our wives and mothers may be entirely our own. So Madge, having said what she had to say, never more cast a glance at the parson, but went on absently breaking dried twigs from the hedges, and listening unconsciously to the carol of the birds.

They parted when they reached the road. The moon had just risen, and shed a quivering light through an old elm-tree, of which the top-most branches were dead and withered. A waggon toiled slowly up a hill, a dog barked in a farmyard close at hand.

‘Good-night, Miss Margaret,’ said the parson, with a faltering voice. It was the only time he had ventured to address her.

‘Good-night, zur,’ said the girl—and she too passed away from that good man’s life unwon.

## CHAPTER VII.

## A WOMAN'S WAY.

THAT evening, after John Giles was gone to bed, Madge began to carol over her needlework, and when Tom Brown came in with his lantern to see that all was well before he went to sleep in the hayloft, she spoke kindly to him and asked him to have a jug of beer, as in old times.

She drank some of the beer herself, and when Tom asked her to sing his favourite song over again, she sang it so readily and so sweetly that his rough coarse nature was quite melted. Then she led Tom to talk of the boy in drab overalls and the big horse that had been left behind by the stranger huntsman ; who had never more been heard of after he had left the inn that October day, now two full weeks ago. She never spoke of the huntsman himself, feeling with true feminine instinct that the subject was not agreeable to her kinsman. She seemed to be

bent on pleasing him, and succeeded so completely, that he told her all about the urchin and his impudence at least a dozen times. She was especially anxious to fix the name of the boy's master and the place of his residence in her memory, and went over it several times with Tom, laughing as she did so ; and asked him to tell her if she had pronounced it rightly.

‘Ees,’ repeated Tom, for the twentieth time. ‘Maister Walker, up street, wor his neame an bidin' pleeace, it wor.’

When Madge had clearly ascertained this fact, the conversation went on less smoothly ; and, as Tom was just going to say something about ‘fairings’ and ‘true lovers’ knots,’ which had more or less reference to a riband she was sewing on a cap, she sent him away to draw another jug of beer, and when he came back stumbling from haste on the way, she was gone.

The next day also, while John Giles and the ostler were busy, she called to a pedlar, who had never passed that way before, and civilly offered him a crust of bread of her own baking and a tempting slice of cheese with his beer. The pedlar, nothing loth, went into the kitchen when

thus bidden, but observed that he had had a bad day and earned no money.

‘There bain’t nowt to pay, maister,’ said the girl, smiling slyly, and then she asked if he could write. The pedlar said he could ‘off and on,’ and surmised that she wanted a letter written to her ‘bo.’ She took his banter quite good-humouredly, and, as pen, ink, paper, and envelopes (then recently invented) were all ready to his hand, he wrote, with many strange contortions and grimaces, some words she told him. They were few words, and he did not take long about it. When he had finished, he inquired with an impudent leer what direction he should put upon the letter ; but she took the closed envelope, and hid it away, after which she looked quite unconscious, and would not say another word to him. So he got huffed and angry, shouldered his pack with a surly look, and went about his business.

In the dusk of the evening she slipped out, while John Giles was drinking with the blacksmith and the sexton, and she had sent Tom Brown to get some flour from the mill, situated a long mile from the inn. After walking briskly through the glebe meadows, where she was not

likely to meet anybody, she rang at the parson's gate, and dropped a curtsey to that gentleman as he came in some embarrassment to meet her. Mr. Mowledy had only an old woman, who slept at home, to wait upon him ; and she had left, as Madge knew, an hour ago, so that he was quite alone.

Having curtsied again, she took the pedlar's letter from her breast, and asked Mr. Mowledy, with her father's duty, to address it.

Mr. Mowledy put on his lightest pair of blue steel spectacles, which he had purchased at an optician's shop in the City when summoned three years before to see his rector, in order that he might not appear at too great a disadvantage in her eyes ; and then mildly demanded the name of her correspondent. She replied demurely that his name was ' Walker.'

' And his Christian-name ? It is always better to write that, in case of mistakes,' observed Mr. Mowledy, wishing perhaps to prolong the interview with his parishioner as long as possible.

The girl hung her head.

' I mean,' said Mr. Mowledy, who feared he might not have explained himself with sufficient

clearness, ‘ his baptismal appellation—the same which was given him, as to all of us, by his godfathers and godmothers. Your name is Margaret ; mine is Marmaduke,’ added Mr. Mowledy, softly, and he blushed.

Now Madge had heard both the stud groom and Mr. Sharpe call the stranger ‘ Duke,’ so she curtsied again, as Mr. Mowledy pronounced his name.

‘ That be t’ neame, zur.’

‘ What ! Marmaduke ? ’ exclaimed Mr. Mowledy. ‘ Dear me, it is an uncommon name too. Don’t you think so, Miss Margaret ? ’

‘ Duke, or maybe Dook, be t’ neame, zur,’ persisted the girl, afraid to let the sound leave her ears lest she should lose it.

‘ Marmaduke,’ reiterated Mr. Mowledy, blandly, and, after further explanatory discourse, the reverend gentleman put the information he had received, with his own knowledge of geography and nomenclature, together. The product was no usual thing. Madge took away her letter addressed in a scrupulously careful and legible manner—

*Mr. Marmaduke Walker  
(Dealer in fermented liquors),  
Upper Street, Islington,  
near London.*

When the village was asleep that night, she posted it unseen and unsuspected. Mrs. Jinks, the postmistress, felt sure it was a letter from the parson, and spread a rumour that he kept a bottle or two of spirits in a snug place for private use. So she told Madge, who said, ' Lauk-a-daisy me !' being unconscious whence the scandal came. Who does know when the grim, scoffing thing called rumour first spreads its agile wings, or whence it comes, or whither it speeds so fast? Dr. Porteous, the rector, heard it in the rules of the King's Bench Prison ; it was whispered to the bishop of the diocese by the Dean of Dronington's widow. The magistrates laughed about 'the curate's sly bottle' when they met at quarter sessions, and one of them, a jolly good fellow who had been in the navy, made a song about it, putting it to rhyme with 'throttle,' and singing it to a roaring chorus after a dinner at the 'Crown,' where the worshipful and loyal gentlemen refreshed themselves in company at the termination of their judicial labours. Mr. Mowledy was the only person for twenty miles round who never heard it at all ; for rumour has a deal of humour in it, for all its gravity, and keeps prudently out of the way of contradiction.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## FOUND DROWNED.

DAY after day passed by for nearly a fortnight, but no letter, addressed to the village inn, ever arrived from Mr. Marmaduke Walker.

Madge watched for the postman as he passed through Wakefield-in-the-Marsh every morning in his donkey-cart, in hopes that he would stop at the 'Chequers ;' and once, when she thought he looked her way, she held out her apron, but he only stared at her and jogged along upon his round.

She seemed to pine visibly away during this time, and to have no care or pride in herself. The curate watched for her in vain as he walked from the church through the glebe meadows, taking always the same way home to his little cottage with a hope that he might meet her again, almost painful in its intensity ; and though he had composed a ser-

mon on a text taken from the thirty-ninth verse of the twenty-fourth chapter of Genesis, especially to ascertain her views upon the subject nearest his heart, she never came to hear it; nor did she go at all to church any more. When Tom Brown shuffled into the kitchen of an evening, he found nobody there. She got dinner and supper silently ready for John Giles, and set it in order upon the white deal table duly scoured; but she seldom tasted the good food herself, and her voice was never heard now singing about the house. She passed most of her time locked up in her own room. But nobody, except Tom Brown, took any notice of her. John Giles had his meals and his beer as he was accustomed to have them, and nothing but an earthquake would have roused his fuddled intelligence. Even a convulsion of nature would have found him with a brown jug in his hand, and he would only have set it down to take it up again after the shock was over. The blacksmith, who had been slowly making up his mind to marry Madge at some time or other, indeed looked about him now and then after he had finished his beer, as if he missed something, but he was not sorry that

matters should bide as they were for a bit longer.

Tom Brown was the only person who knew that there was anything wrong, and he tried in uncouth ways to serve or comfort her. When she came downstairs, after moaning for hours to herself, she would find the hardest part of her work done. He kept the fire burning, swept the hearth, drew water, and put the kettle on ready for her tea, which she drank eagerly, taking hardly anything else. When one of the old customers called for her, he answered, and made some mumbling excuse which served the purpose well enough. One day he brought her some apples, which he knew she liked, and another he walked to Dronington for an orange. She found them on the table beside her tea things, and left them untouched. She appeared unable to bear the daylight, and never went outside the door as she used to do. She would stand with her face turned from the window, and her arm resting on the high kitchen mantelpiece ; if spoken to, she answered without moving. All her clothes hung loosely on her : she had become terribly thin and wan. She started at the least noise,

and once, when Tom Brown came in unexpectedly and looked her full in the face, she shrank from him as though she were afraid. She avoided him more resolutely after that ; watching with a beating heart and frightened eyes lest he should catch her unawares again.

Her favourite occupation when alone was to open a large carved oak work-box which had belonged to her foster-mother, and take out one by one the upper-leathers of a pair of top-boots, a dried rose-bud, and a strip of flimsy paper. She was never tired of looking at these things, but would rock herself in her chair, with her clasped hands on her knees, and wail over them. If she heard a step on the stairs, or any one called for her, she would hide them hurriedly away, and with trembling limbs and a ghastly face, assure herself that her occupation had not been discovered.

It was about the tenth day after the letter to Mr. Marmaduke Walker had remained unanswered, that a great change came over the girl. She rose very early in the morning, and toiled throughout the day without ceasing. She arranged all her cupboards, and the presses where the household linen was kept. She

washed and put away all her glass and china, and carefully attended to everything that had been neglected and wanted setting to rights. Before she went to bed she raked out the kitchen fire and laid it afresh, spread the cloth for breakfast, and cut some slices of bread and butter, to be ready for John Giles when he got up. She bade good-night to Tom Brown very kindly, drew some beer for him herself, and opened the door for him when he went out to his hayloft over the stables, closing it loudly after him and bolting it. Then all these things having been done in order, and the whole house throughly swept and garnished, she went to her room with a strange, absent air, and opened her work-box once more. But she did not cry over it now: there was only a sad, resolute expression in the girl's eyes; and after silently contemplating her worthless treasures for an hour or more, she opened her window and looked down into the road. She could see clearly, for the moon was at her full, and nothing was stirring for a mile around. The bat and the fieldmouse only were abroad, and the low hoot of an owl coming from the ruined rectory was the solitary sound which broke the

stillness of the night. Not a dog barked, not a light was seen in a cottage, not a watcher kept vigil at Wakefield-in-the-Marsh. She remained for some ten minutes, looking anxiously from the window, and having satisfied herself that she was unobserved, she threw a shawl over her head, so as to conceal her features, and went quickly and noiselessly downstairs. She had thought of everything. The bolts, which had been cleaned and oiled that day, slid smoothly back at her touch; the door turned easily upon its hinges, her bare feet fell unheard upon the hard ground. She went on walking very fast, turning neither to the right nor to the left, till she came to the mill-stream, at a place where it was very deep and rapid. Then she stopped, and knelt down by the waterside, and prayed with a smothered sob; after which she cast a startled glance hastily around her, and listened like some hunted animal. A fish which leapt out of the stream had disturbed her, and there was a far sound of wheels, but it died away and all was still. It was only the night waggon, slowly passing on its way to Dronington, and when it had gone there was not a human being who could

hear her brief cries and short struggles. She went then to the river's brink, took her shawl from off her head, and tied it closely round the skirt of her dress in a tight knot, so that she could not move her legs or feet, and she let herself fall headlong into the swift-flowing water. A loud splash, one natural effort, with uplifted arms, for life, and all was over. She was borne fast down stream.

## CHAPTER IX.

## NIGHT LINES.

THE Reverend Mr. Mowledy had one delight on this sublunary sphere of unrewarded merit. He was fond of fishing. He might have had some difficulty in reconciling a sport so cruel to a tender conscience, but he reflected that Simon Peter, and Andrew his brother, with James and John the sons of Zebedee, were all fishers, as well as divines: and by the first rules of sound doctrine that which they did unreproved could not be considered wrong without heresy by an orthodox clergyman of the Established Church of England; on the contrary, it was worthy of respect and imitation. Mr. Mowledy was so merciful a man that he practised the fisherman's art with as little pain to the fish as their case allowed; but he was also a logician and a casuist. He reflected that he might be a humble instrument in the hands of Providence, selected to

wage war against the order of Apodes, who ruthlessly devoured snails and other harmless living things alive, prowling greedily about in the darkness beneath the waters to satisfy the lust of conquest and the sin of inordinate appetite. If Mr. Mowledy took them captive and slew them while trooping on these blood-thirsty expeditions, it was only the usage of lawful warfare, and he could not be viewed, even by the Apodes, if they reasoned candidly on the subject, in any other light than as a champion and defender of the helpless.

The head is always the dupe of the heart ; and as Mr. Mowledy's delight was angling for eels, he was sure to find a comfortable excuse for so doing ; indeed it is among the advantages of learning that it enables a man to discover many excellent and conclusive arguments in favour of his wishes, and to confound his opponents who have seldom studied the subject so deeply.

Moreover, Mr. Mowledy caught the eels gently, with a ball of string twisted into nooses, which got into their teeth as they marauded about in search of prey. He did not torture them with hooks. There were some worms im-

paled upon the string. Truly. Man, however, is a rational animal, and will not be baulked in pursuit of pleasure by a second obstacle which turns up unexpectedly after he has overcome or thrown down the first. Mr. Mowledy thought long and patiently before he found a solution to the difficulty of the worms. But he would not give it up, and ultimately satisfied his intelligence that it was a convenient and proper custom to take them by stratagem, or a garden spade, and apply them to the use of man. For man has dominion over all the creatures of the earth, and more especially the worm, which is a species of the serpent,—it is plainly so called in the Swedish tongue, and that has much affinity with the Anglo-Saxon or pure English. Now, the serpent is an accursed beast, whose head is to be bruised by the heels of all who are born of woman. There is enmity between the serpent and the whole human race; not the enmity of passion or prejudice, but a just and perpetual displeasure enjoined by the law. In destroying worms or serpents, Mr. Mowledy was only carrying into execution the mild sentence which had been passed upon them for the heinous offence of having brought about, by craft and

subtlety, the awful expulsion of mankind from Eden, caused the woman to bring forth her children in sorrow, and man to eat only of bread in the sweat of his face, till returned to the dust from out of whence he was taken.

Neither could it be urged that the conduct of worms or serpents since the Fall had been such as to merit any remission of their punishment. They had evinced no signs of repentance. They had accepted battle with mankind, they undermined and cankered all his works, they consumed his substance, overthrew his palaces, made leaks in mighty ships, eat up his very records, and feasted finally on his remains. They are notoriously the infernal brood of Satan, undergoing, as Linnæus and other naturalists declare, no metamorphosis ; having no eyes nor limbs nor bowels of compassion nor future existence. Their name is a synonym for that remorse which gnaws and torments the wicked, for decay and sickly grief, for beings debased and despised, for worthless things which work men ill by slow, sure, secret means.

Thus Mr. Mowledy having fully argued out the case of the worms with himself, they being

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absent in contumacy, he had no more scruples touching their impalement ; and when his duty to his parishioners had been performed in such wise as we have seen, he humbly trusted that he might be permitted to sit still half the night now and then in a punt for piscatorial purposes.

Mr. Mowledy was intently watching his lines on that November night when Madge had fled from the inn, and probably thinking how fine a dish of eels he might send her on the morrow, for he had heard that she had been ailing. The spot where his punt was made fast was not unfavourable for such a subject of contemplation. It was a dark deep pool behind the mill, and now lay deep in shadow, untroubled by the brawling stream which rushed turbulently above and below it. Ground-bait being also deposited there in considerable quantities from the dust of the mill, and Mr. Mowledy being on good terms with the miller, this pool was his favourite piece of water. November nights, however, are cold and comfortless, so towards one o'clock the worthy gentleman, who never suffered his favourite pastime to interfere with more important things, bethought him that he had some of his flock who lived a long way off to visit on

the following day, and that a little sleep would be needful to fit him for the labours of his calling. Therefore he first began to disentangle the strings and worms at the end of his lines, and then slowly to roll them up for another occasion. It was not short or easy work, because he had nobody to help him, and his fingers were half frozen. The string stiffened almost as soon as it came out of the water and slipped through hands made clammy by contact with the eels. The loops of his line, moreover, caught in weeds and projecting roots of trees, which had thirstily thrust themselves into the stream. So he was glad when it was over and he could unfasten his punt to go home before the day broke. He was just about to do so, when he heard a sudden splash, as of a body falling from the opposite bank, a few yards above the mill: and immediately afterwards a motionless human form was borne rapidly by him on the swift-flowing waters. The full moon shone very brightly on the upturned face of a young girl, as it sank and rose again, dashed about by the eddies; and Mr. Mowledy's heart stopped—smote with a sudden and awful anguish—as he recognised the pale features and golden hair of her who

was all the world to him. In a moment he had plunged into the mill-stream, and struck out lustily. He had been a strong swimmer in his youth ; a Winchester boy and an Oxford man, he was always fond of the water, and now his old practice stood him in good stead. Making rapidly on beyond the spot where the body had sunk, he trod the water and watched till it rose again. Then he dived gallantly for it, caught it midway as it went down, and bore it to the nearest shore.

He was not a bad physician, this obscure country parson ; and he was aware that when a person is submerged under water, suffocation ensues, not in consequence of the access of water to the lungs, but merely from the exclusion of air, and that if breath could be once brought back to her she would live. He knew also that as she had not been more than three minutes in the water, and had not been immediately submerged, there was good hope, if the means of restoration were at hand ; and failing them, he could only do his best. Now the men of the mill had long gone home, but the mill stood open, and there were still some embers of a fire which had been left burning for him by his

friendly parishioner ; so he carried the girl quickly thither, threw his large boating-cloak and such wraps as he had with him over her, and did all things needful till her fluttering breath gradually returned, and Madge, opening her eyes, looked wondering around her. In less than half-an-hour she was completely restored to consciousness ; and, having been so short a while in the water, was able to return home.

The good gentleman, with the innate delicacy and chivalry of a Christian mind, forbore to ask her any questions ; and when she would have given him an explanation he stayed her softly, and sought with words of true and lofty charity to calm her trouble, be it what it might —to raise her up again in her own esteem, as a human soul, precious to all the world in the possibilities of the future : to him, a Minister of the Church, most precious, most revered. A cardinal speaking to an empress had not chosen better, simpler, or more respectful language. When the colour gradually came back to her cheeks, and he saw that she was recovered, and quite quiet and resigned in manner, he knelt down, bidding her in solemn accents to do likewise, and prayed fervently in the brief and af-

fecting words familiar to him through years passed in bearing consolation to the afflicted of his congregation :—

‘ O Lord God, who hast wounded us for our sins, and consumed us for our transgressions, by Thy late heavy and dreadful visitation, and now, in the midst of judgment remembering mercy, hast redeemed our souls from the jaws of death ; we offer unto Thy fatherly goodness, ourselves, our souls and bodies, which Thou hast delivered, to be a living sacrifice unto Thee, always praising and magnifying Thy mercies in the midst of Thy Church, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.’

And having prayed thus, giving to the Most High the glory of her miraculous preservation, he rose from his knees and blest her mutely ; forbearing to intrude on her when he could no longer be of use, and contenting himself by watching her unseen when she left the mill, lest she should faint or fall down by the way. But she arrived safely at her home, about two hours after she had quitted it, and passed unquestioned through the open door into her chamber, where all was still.

## CHAPTER X.

## WHAT HAPPENS.

MR. MOWLEDY was very ill for some days after he had bravely rescued the drowning girl, and it is one of the many inexplicable things in this world, that heroic actions are seldom performed with impunity. His wet clothes had avenged themselves on him for their untimely ruin, and struck him down with an unseen blow, which brought on fever and ague, leaving him to reflect, in that condition, that Virtue is verily its own reward.

Meanwhile affairs at the 'Chequers' resumed their former aspect, and went on absolutely as if nothing had happened. Madge did not recover her cheerfulness for long afterwards; but she went about her work, and seemed to take a pleasure in it, or to find relief from bodily exertion. She was peaceful enough if left alone, but sullen and even defiant if any one interfered

with her. Several times also she asserted her independence in express terms, which troubled John Giles not a little. She reminded him that she was not his daughter, that she was naught to him, nor he to her, but a friend, and she added that she was minded to earn her own living and to see the world. She expressed a desire to take service in London town, and asked the brewer's man, when he came with his gigantic horses and casks, if he knew of a place for a hard-working girl 'anywheers,' it did not matter in what house or city. He answered that he knew of no such place, and that it would be uneasy to come at on account of the hardness of the times, which ever gives and will give a short and civil reply to an unwelcome request; and he told her, being nudged thereto by Giles, that she did not know when she was well off. Then she turned to Tom Brown, in her restless desire to be gone, and ordered him to find a place for her, begging him with sighs and tears to lose no time about it.

The poor fellow thrust his knuckles in his eyes at the bare thought of losing her, and besought her in his rough way to tell him if any of her neighbours had given her occasion to be

angry, that he might right her with his fist and tongue. He would let them have a piece of his mind, he confidently said, (he did not think how small it was,) and thump them into their senses. It is the English plan, and not an evil one ; for sense compelled by blows is wondrously discreet and modest.

But she said nothing in return. She seemed subdued and sad. Indeed, she was becoming perplexed and half distraught in her trouble. She had tried, she alone knew how desperately, to put an end to it ; perhaps by death itself, if her secret could be known, afterwards by flight. Both means had failed her ; and, like a bird caught in the toils of the fowler, now she fluttered in a passion of fear and woe, now cowered timidly, and ceased to struggle.

So it happened that when Tom Brown came into the kitchen one night, the girl's feelings were dull and blunted with overwear. She was not ill, but she was weak and listless. Her poor honest working hands hung down beside her, and she could no longer collect her thoughts. She felt a little light-headed, and wondered, in a hazy, half-unconscious way, whether she should

ever be like the idiot girl who went about with straws in her hair last harvest.

She took no notice of Tom Brown, but let him sit down by the fireside and talk to her as he would. He looked like some good watch-dog keeping guard over her, and his rude speech was little better than a well-meaning growl, coming from a faithful heart, which would have bled or broke to please her.

‘Madge,’ cried the simple fellow at last, and there was a natural pathos in his coarse appeal, ‘Oi carn’t a stand it no mawer. I’ll go an’ list for a sodjer an you wun’t tayk oi wan oi axes yow. Oi’d ha’ mayd yow a honist mon an yow wud wed. An’ thow ut bain’t fur t’ bee, thar be a mattur o’ twentee pund I ha’ seaved oop —doee tayk t’ blunt. I’ be onder t’ hyrick yunder.’

The good lout shook and blubbered like a boy as he spoke, for he was in grim earnest, and he took up his lantern to leave her for ever ; when she, with a scared aspect and mien like that of one interrogated while walking in sleep, asked him what he would have of her ; and when he told her again and again, till she understood his meaning, she cried and wrung

her hands till the blood started between the nails of them.

He stole gently up to her with untaught affection, and talked to her in homely phrase of the childhood they had passed together, and of the many times and oft he had held her on his knees as a little mite no bigger than his arm ; till first she smiled, betrayed into forgetfulness for a moment by the deceiver Memory, and then she sobbed convulsively, answering him in gasps. Any one, she said, might wed with such a thing as she was, if they had a mind for their bargain. The parson, the blacksmith, or he. It was all the same to her. She only wanted a morsel of bread, and could work for it. She thanked God for that. She would be beholden to nobody. Her voice as she spoke was sometimes hard and even fierce, sometimes hushed and supplicating. She hardly seemed to know what she was saying, and her mind wandered from one subject to another. She told him she did not care what became of her, or of him ; and that she did not like him, or ever could like him ; and then she clung to his arm, and went into hysterics.

By-and-by she was quite worn out and as weak as an infant. He pressed her again in

plain words to wed with him, and she submitted passively, saying little ; but before they parted it was settled between them that he might have the banns put up on the following Sunday. She confessed that she had attempted to kill herself, but would try to make him a true wife if he could forgive her ; and she thought she had told him all, while his dull comprehension suspected nothing. She was but an inarticulate village girl, and he an ignorant country bumpkin. Such mistakes sometimes occur between more lettered people, and few shall read the mysteries of the soul through the dark glass of language.

An hour before she had fought angrily against the joyless fate which pursued her so unrelentingly. Now it had overtaken her, for better or for worse she was humble and submissive to it. The strife was over, and she had yielded. She warmed Tom Brown's beer, spiced it with nutmeg, and put a roasted apple in it, as she used to do on holidays before the stranger huntsman came. She lit his lantern when he went away, and kissed him as she bade him good-night. Then she walked quietly, with dry eyelids, to her room, and slept soundly the sleep of utter exhaustion.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE VILLAGE CURATE.

TOM BROWN dressed himself in his best, with a flowery waistcoat, short trowsers crumpled at the knees, and a coat much too large for him ; he took a nosegay in his hand, and he went with shambling steps and sheepish gait to see the parson. With him went John Giles, who had a fuddled notion of what was going on, and had a generally intoxicated or maudlin regard for his wife's kinsman, so that he felt pleased to keep Madge and him about the house, and saw no reason why they should not marry as he himself had done. The pair walked on in silence at about the same pace, though John Giles waddled, puffing as he went for want of breath, and the younger man slouched along covering a yard each step. They kept wide apart, though their dispositions were so amicable ; but John Giles having indulged

one of his small gooseberry-coloured eyes with a movement not unlike a wink at starting, Tom felt at a disadvantage, and turned his shame-faced head half over his shoulder to escape from banter which seemed to tickle him beyond endurance. He liked, yet dreaded, and flinched from it. He knew that Giles, who loved his joke, was watching slyly to poke him in the ribs and talk of Madge. The dull man had no other way of being funny; and Tom Brown could appreciate such wit, and give and take a jest, as Giles had often proved. The distance which Tom observed between them was after all but a cunning trick of fence, and John was sure to have his thrust before the day was out.

Thus, each on guard, yet both well pleased, they came to the parson's gate, and Tom Brown rang the bell.

John hit him in a moment then. 'Fayth,' he chuckled, 'ye be arl reddy wi' *t'ring*, Tummus.'

'Un bain't rownd *t'ring*, be it?' muttered red-cheeked Tummus, giving himself a crick in the neck by his spasmodic efforts to escape his tickler.

John Giles's humour was not very abundant,

but it was long-winded to a proverb. Having once got his joke he would never let it go, but hit you on the same place with it for years. He laughed till he was almost black in the face about Tom having got his wedding-ring for nothing, said he should never want a dinner while he bore off the bell—a phrase which had more meaning in it than he thought, and he would have jeered on till night now Tom was at his mercy and could not stride away ; but Mr. Mowledy called to them from his window to go in.

They disputed who should cross the threshold first, and shoved each other forward by the shoulders according to the forms of rural ceremony. Tom Brown, who was the stronger, pushed in John at last, and having taken off their hats and wiped their brows, they stared before them ; then they pulled each other by their coat-skirts, which were long and ample, because they liked their money's worth from the tailor, and he gave it with an upright mind, as both were ready to avouch.

The parson mildly asked them why they came together, or why they came at all, and hoped that nothing had gone ill with them or

theirs at the inn. It was not Sunday, and the worthy man marvelled to see them there in such array, twiddling their thumbs and all abroad, so big with speech and yet unable to bring forth.

They said that nothing had gone ill with them, and John assured the parson it was a fine frosty day.

Tom, thus encouraged, added that there had been a deal of rain last month.

The parson answered 'yes' to these remarks, and then the conversation stopped, till John observed, 'that frost was a better thing for the roads than heavy snowfalls.'

'Ay, zur,' said Tom, 'especially when unthaws.'

The parson smiled, though he was still ailing and confined to the house by racking rheumatism. Experience had long since taught him not to hurry any man's cattle; so he waited with a placid, benevolent expression which was habitual to his features in repose, for that which Providence might send him next.

Providence sent him nothing for ten minutes. Tom Brown looked up at the ceiling, and John Giles got back his breath, which had been pumped out by chuckling. The Curate's

cat purred as she lay on the scanty rug by the fire, and the pale beams of a wintry sun fell athwart the motes in the sordid chamber, casting a deeper shadow on its unpapered walls and common furniture. It is a beautiful superstition which preserves the belief that an angel passes wherever there is silence. Perhaps an angel was passing then, for the Curate had need that angels should minister unto him. He had heard in his time the message which comes to us all from the Evil One, and might have chosen the things of this world had he willed it. If he had said to Satan, 'Get thee hence,' it was but merciful he should now be comforted.

At last John Giles unburthened his bosom of the momentous tidings that Tom Brown and Madge were to be asked in church next Sunday.

The blow was struck full on the good man's heart, and it fell like an axe on tender wood. It was well that the God of love had sent an angel to him then.

Mr. Mowledy shaded his eyes with his hand and turned away from the light. He went to his bookcase, where he kept some manuscript sermons and copies of the parish registers, and he prayed silently. When he spoke to his

visitors again, his face wore an unearthly garb of pallor, but upon it was a divine light: it might have been a ray of that eternal glory which illumined the brow of Israel's lawgiver when he came from communion with the King of kings upon Sinai. His truth endureth from generation to generation; we may all seek help and counsel from on high.

The Curate's voice was very firm and calm. He wished his parishioners happiness and contentment. He reminded the bridegroom of the sacred and indissoluble nature of the contract upon which he was about to enter, and asked kindly after the health of Miss Margaret without one faltering accent. Then he took down the name of Thomas Brown, and filled up the necessary printed forms and notices with a steady hand. Having done so, he asked for Madge's register of baptism, to see if she were of full age, and inquired whether she had father or mother living. 'I should have consulted it before,' said Mr. Mowledy, with a slight cough, 'but the baptismal registers of this parish appear to have been partially, or in some cases altogether, eaten up by mice.'

John Giles replied that he would look for

this document among his deceased wife's papers, and the two men went away, giving hearty thanks to the Curate, now the ice was broken, and he accompanied them to his door, where he took gentle leave of them.

When they were gone, he sat down and wept, with his grey head bowed upon his hands, and the last hope fled from his lonely existence here below.

All was very silent in his room that night and evermore when he was alone. Perhaps the angel came and dwelt with him.

## CHAPTER XII.

## DR. PORTEOUS.

It was not so easy to find the copy of Madge's certificate of baptism among the relics of the late landlady of the 'Chequers' inn. She had left a few old clothes behind her and much linen. If there had been a paper it had been swept away as rubbish, and was lost, or not forthcoming. So John Giles told the parson he could make nought of it, when he saw him next day; and the Curate, after musing for a while, recollected something he had heard long ago, and which had lingered in his memory. Therefore, he set out upon the following day, by coach, for London, to see Dr. Porteous, rector of Wakefield-in-the-Marsh, who had told him that something which remained in his memory, and who had kept the parish registers before his time.

The rectory of Wakefield was at this period

one of those scandals of the Church of England which have not yet quite ceased. It was worth four thousand a-year, secured upon land which had gradually risen in value by improved cultivation in the lapse of ages, while the population of the place had dwindled in like proportion to a few score of souls. Wakefield had first been famous for its bows and arrows, then for its cloth ; but commerce and mechanics had moved away from it to other places, and now it produced nothing but a few eggs and a little poultry. It had once been the seat of a wealthy monastery, and the monastery, transformed into the residence of a shopkeeping peer made by Mr. Pitt, was now in ruins ; the shopkeeping peer's money having gone in the next generation to the usurers, from whence it came. The latest holder of the living had been one Dr. Porteous, a gentleman of good family, who had fallen into difficulties ; his living had been sequestrated, and he had not been seen at Wakefield for a dozen years. People often spoke of his brother, Sir Richard, who had once owned half the county, and been master of the Cloudesdale hounds ; but he too had drifted into space—some said he was at Boulogne, and

some at Florence—and the only representative of the rich benefice or its patron was Mr. Mowledy, the village curate.

He had only seen Dr. Porteous twice since he had been appointed to the cure. Once at a club in Pall Mall, when the preliminaries relating to his engagement were arranged, and once at a solicitor's office, when his stipend was in arrear. Upon the latter occasion, Dr. Porteous had declared, with many handsome apologies, that *he* had received Mr. Mowledy's stipend by mistake, which he supposed settled the question; and he suggested that they should now start afresh—a proposition to which the Curate agreed, not, however, without bewilderment; but he was not a man of business.

His recollection of this Doctor of Divinity was that of a portly, well-dressed clergyman, of great suavity of manner, who had treated him with punctilious politeness, and left him to pay for a luncheon which the Doctor had ordered, as though he were the treasurer of a bishop who thought such mundane things too profane and small for ecclesiastical observance.

Mr. Mowledy had never seen Dr. Porteous since these transactions, and never got the ar-

rears of his stipend then overdue ; so he felt some delicacy in presenting himself unsummoned before his superior, lest he should appear to him as an importunate creditor. Still Duty having called Mr. Mowledy with its still small voice, he went.

Dr. Porteous lived in the same parish as the Archbishop of Canterbury, not, indeed, from choice, but of necessity ; and he lodged in a semi-respectable locality called ' Melina Place, Lambeth,' because it was within the ' rules ' of the King's Bench Prison. Mr. Mowledy had no difficulty in finding a residence known to all the hackney coachmen of the time, but was surprised, on his arrival there, to find that so grand a personage as the Doctor had descended to take up his abode in so small a house. It was an unprosperous, dilapidated house ; it had a neglected and lopsided, or racketty look. As the Curate raised the knocker of the door he observed that one side of it was broken and the other was loose.

A slatternly girl, the maid-of-all-work of a London lodging in the suburbs, answered to his hesitating rap, and behind her was an elderly gentleman going out for a walk.

He was a loosely-dressed person, in large black clothes, stained and spotted with iron-mould. He wore a shirt-frill, a white neck-cloth resembling a pudding-bag, black gaiters, and a broad-brimmed hat, rather rusty. His face seemed red at first sight, but on examination changed to purple. His eyes were blood-shot, his nose, very bulbous as to its shape, was granulated like the mulberry. His legs were thin and shrivelled, his stomach was round. He had a grave, magisterial deportment, and in all his shabby degradation preserved the unmistakeable bearing of a gentleman.

He looked at Mr. Mowledy with the keen alarmed glance which invariably characterizes any human being who has been hunted to earth ; and he knew him instantly.

‘ Dear me ! ’ said he in a magniloquent voice, which seemed to come from the middle of his throat, ‘ my excellent and worthy colleague and friend—permit me to say *friend*. How do you do, reverend sir—how *do* you do ? ’

Dr. Porteous bowed with extreme affability, and hurried down the door-steps into the dreary garden, which lay waste before the house (as some such garden did before most suburban

houses five-and-thirty years ago), and as he did so Mr. Mowledy heard a shrill vixenish female voice in pursuit of him.

The Doctor, however, having safely got beyond reach of it, paused grandly. The natural manners of a well-bred scholar then returned to him, and he asked, with a simplicity and good sense almost touching, what fortunate circumstance had procured him the pleasure of the Curate's visit.

‘I think, sir,’ said Mr. Mowledy, not unmoved by what he saw—for he too was a gentleman—‘that you have some private knowledge of a young woman known in your parish as Madge or Margaret Giles, but who was baptised under some other name.’

‘Yes,’ answered the Doctor, putting on his unfortunate professional manners again. ‘I am fully aware of the circumstances to which you refer, Mr. Mowledy. As a clergyman of the Church of England, my sacred and responsible—most responsible *and* most sacred—calling is duly impressed upon my memory: and I may say, Mr. Mowledy, that not an hour of my existence passes by in which I am unmindful of my duty.’

This was not precisely what Mr. Mowledy wanted, and he said so, with much deference and respect.

‘Let us dine together,’ said the Doctor. ‘It is now five o’clock. Is your club the Oxford and Cambridge or the University? We can then talk over the subject, in which I observe you take an interest. Young women, indeed, naturally inspire benevolence and regard, and I may say that no profession, howsoever sacred be its character, can, or indeed ought to, withdraw us wholly from an influence which refines the manners and purifies the heart.’

Mr. Mowledy sighed, and briefly said ‘he was not a member of any club,’—a fact which Dr. Porteous knew very well; and if Mr. Mowledy had been member of both these clubs the Doctor could not have accompanied him to either of them; for he was bound not to go beyond the ‘rules’ of the prison in which he was, by a legal fiction, supposed to be incarcerated for debt: though he had recently bought a limited liberty from the marshal or governor of the King’s Bench—an officer who was privileged to sell small supplies of light and air, price ten guineas each.

‘Well, then, reverend sir,’ said the Doctor, with lofty courtesy, ‘you must dine with me I hear you have no objection to moderate festivity—nay, I will take no refusal, for what says St. Paul? Does he not enjoin the clergy to practise hospitality? Let us obey the teaching of that saint and gentleman. They cook a rump-steak well not far from hence. I beseech you, in Christian brotherhood, to accompany me thither.’

He entered a neat little hotel, where the waiters evidently knew him, and ordered a good dinner, with a bottle of their best port—for the good of the house, he said.

They sat down together, and his heart opened to the good cheer.

‘Ah, reverend sir,’ remarked Dr. Porteous, ‘there was a time when my larder was always full of old wine and fat venison, and I could have offered you a haunch, with some rare old Madeira worthy of your experienced taste, and which had twice made a voyage to the Indies; now, we must be content with—what you see.’

Mr. Mowledy professed himself perfectly satisfied, as indeed he was, and the dinner con-

tinued till, by-and-by the wine warming the Doctor into confidence, he resumed—

‘ Yes, reverend sir, I was not always so unlucky as I am now—the sport of fallen fortunes. I remember my brother said to me, “ Bless you, Ned—for he called me Ned—you shan’t starve, though I have brought the old place tumbling down about our ears. Father’s and mother’s money is gone—so is yours, my boy, at Newmarket ; but Will Boultbee is just dead in time. Bishop Smyler, Courthope’s tutor, will ordain you, and you shall have the family living before the smash comes and the creditors can seize it.”

‘ Richard had a warm heart, and we drank many bottles of Burgundy, I remember, that night before we parted.

‘ “ You’ll have to raise money enough, Edward, to pay my debts of honour to the Duke,” continued my brother, “ and you must buy an annuity for little Zephirine ” (Zephirine, Mr. Mowledy, was the greatest opera-dancer of her day. She married the Polish Prince Walkyrski shortly afterwards), “ and the rest will be your own. You’ll throw me something across the water out of your tithes now and then, Ned, when I’m out of luck,—won’t you ? ”

‘ Of course I agreed to everything, you know, Mr. Mowledy,’ said the Doctor, his mouth being full of a salad which he had prepared with much attention ; ‘ only, unfortunately, I am free to confess that I found it difficult to remember that I had not four thousand a-year, which was the full income of the living ; whereas I had only six hundred, for Sharpe, the money-lender, bled me woefully, even as the thieves must have bled the traveller whom the good Samaritan found and nourished.’

He finished his story, and told another, then another, washing down the reminiscences of the past with draughts more and more copious, till Mr. Mowledy observed, on a meek consultation of his silver watch, that it was growing late, and with some dexterity turned the conversation back to Madge.

‘ Ah, to be sure,’ said the Doctor, condescendingly, as he opened the third bottle of port. ‘ I remember she was christened in the name of Margaret Wyldwyl. I dined with the Duke a few days after, for he was an intimate associate of my brother, and they used to refresh themselves with wine and wager sums of money with each other. I told his Grace that I had

had the honour of performing the right of baptism to a kinswoman of his illustrious family.

“ ‘ The devil you had ! ’ said the Duke, looking black as thunder. ‘ D——it, parson ’ (for I regret to mention his Grace always used profane oaths after dinner), ‘ if any — Scotch-woman is taking any — liberties with my name, I expect you to put a stop to it, or I ’ll set one of my bishops at you, and strip the gown off your — back, by George ! ’ ”

‘ I knew that his Grace could keep his word, and would do so if I made him angry, for there were no less than three right reverend fathers of the Church who owed their seats in the Upper House to the Wyldwyl influence ; so I held my tongue, of course, and nothing more was said about it. But I have sometimes thought that one of the family, possibly Lord George—well, we won’t talk scandal, for the credit of the cloth. Her name, however, is Margaret Wyldwyl, pronounced Wyvil, as you know.’

Mr. Mowledy did not know it, and he said so ; whereat the Doctor went off again at score, and gave him much curious information as to the arbitrary pronunciation of English family names. He also promised to send him Margaret

Wyldwyl's baptismal register, of which he had preserved an authenticated copy, from respect to the aristocracy: and in due time did so, 'to prevent unnecessary scandal or inquiry into such a subject,' he wrote, with other well-turned sentences to like effect.

The Curate having thus obtained the object of his visit, rose to go, and the Doctor, with great urbanity, called for the bill. When it came, he asked the Curate carelessly to settle it; and on Mr. Mowledy putting down a five-pound note for that purpose, he absently took up the change, saying he would give it to Mr. Mowledy when they got home presently. So the Curate accompanied his rector back to Melina Place. When they got there, and knocked for admittance, an angry head in a mob-cap was thrust from the window, and the shrill voice, which Mr. Mowledy had heard before, rated the Doctor in no measured terms. The Curate's heart was touched to see the poor gentleman so humbled, and he moved away a little distance, to be out of hearing, while the storm blew over. He waited for some time while coarse taunts and hard invectives fell pelting on the Doctor's head, and when he disappeared with a sudden

jerk, as though pulled into the house by a claw, Mr. Mowledy sighed gently over the loss of his small savings, and returned to Wakefield-in-the-Marsh with some pity, and even some respect, for the castaway.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## WEDDING-BELLS.

THE Curate having received an authentic copy of the baptismal certificate in due course from Dr. Porteous, called at the 'Chequers' with this document in his pocket-book, to assure John Giles that there need be no further obstacle or delay to retard the wedding. He even showed the certificate, in his precise, conscientious way, to John, in proof of the fact. Upon seeing the certificate, John scratched his head and said he would 'be danged if he hadn't a peaper loike that there' in the lining of his hat. He had indeed taken it out of his wife's cupboard one day after her death, and put it there because the hat was too large for him. Now he removed it cheerfully for inspection, and the two papers, being minutely compared, were found to be identical.

The names of Thomas Brown, bachelor, and

Margaret Wyldwyl, spinster, both of this parish, being then duly published in church on three successive Sundays, and nobody seeing any just cause or impediment why they should not be joined in holy matrimony, they were married; and a joyous peal of bells was rung from the church steeple as they walked home through the meadows, attended by a party of bumpkin well-wishers, who dined somewhat uproariously afterwards, being bidden thereto by John Giles with a willing mind. He soon gave the business altogether up to the pair, being naturally averse to trouble, and glad to have it taken off his hands. But nothing was outwardly changed at the inn. Tom Brown still did his ostler's work as before. There was not much to do. The waggoners mostly brought a truss of hay with them, and some corn and chaff ready mixed in nose-bags. There was only the trough to fill with water every morning, and to take out a bung to let it drain off at night before a fresh supply was put in. Now and then a farmer stopped his cart going or coming back from Dronington market once a week. But farmers' horses are patient cattle, and they seldom required anything beyond a pail, and a handful of clover. The

newly-married couple had an easy life. The 'Chequers' had its set of steady customers, who came and went at regular hours. The money they paid was put in the kitchen drawer, a few pence at a time, and when the brewer sent his collector he was paid out of it in coppers. They gained enough to live upon and pay the miller, the allsorts shop, and occasionally the distiller; but they put nothing by. They had their own poultry, eggs, milk, bacon, pork and vegetables. At Christmas there was an ox killed in the village, and the Wakefield folk divided it among them, paying chiefly in kind or in work for each portion. They had little need of money, and if a hostile army had invaded England, they would have had no harder task than to requisition fifty shillings at Wakefield-in-the-Marsh: half of the coins would certainly have been pence or farthings.

Madge seemed perfectly reconciled to her lot, if she had ever fancied she had reason to be dissatisfied with it, and at no subsequent period of her life did she ever appear to regret her marriage. Her husband was a clumsy, good-tempered fellow, who did all he could to please her, and she ruled over her household, as women will, in a natural way.

Her health came back, and her figure developed into matronly proportions with such surprising quickness that she acquired a character for great energy and decision among the gossips of the village.

‘Thee hasn’t been se larng a maykin’ up thee moind, Madge Brown,’ said Mrs. Jinks, the blacksmith’s mother, soon after the wedding. ‘T’ littal strarnger wun’t be tu larng upon ‘un’s rowad, that ‘un wun’t, so I tells ’ee—now mark moy wurruds.’

But Madge happened to be busy hanging out some clothes to dry just then, so she was obliged to walk away, and when she came back made Mrs. Jinks no answer, having to iron an apron; which work she evidently thought admitted of no delay, for she raked up the fire with a loud clatter. And though Mrs. Jinks, both then and afterwards, showed a female desire to recur to this subject, it so chanced that Madge had always something noisy to do whenever she touched upon it, though Mrs. Jinks was an old friend of hers, and the women liked each other.

‘Wal, Madge, ye’ll carl me in yere trouble, wun’t ’ee, Madge? I be allus there, I be—

yunder at the farge wi' Harry. Tummus have unlee far to put that hed uv his'n out o' t' winder and holler. Oi'll cum to 'ee farst as ould legs 'll carr' me—that I wull.'

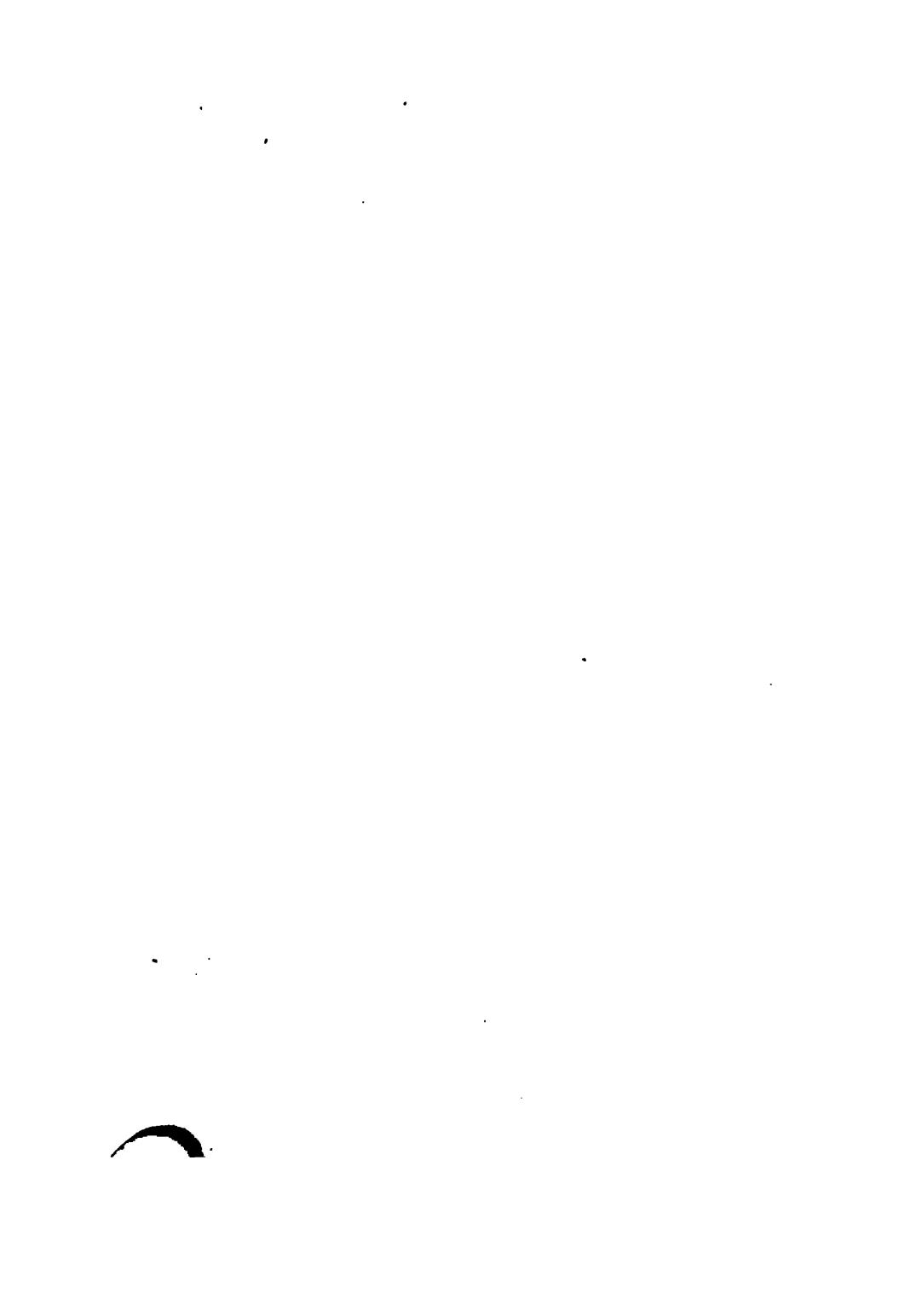
Madge promised to send for her as soon as her experience should be necessary: and Tom Brown also engaged the professional services of a medical man at Dronington. But neither Mrs. Jinks nor the doctor were unfortunately present when the event happened; for it occurred quite unexpectedly, to the extreme increase of the prophetic reputation of Mrs. Jinks, who, hearing with great delight that a man child had been born to Tom Brown, prematurely, and in the night, joyfully exclaimed that she had always foreseen it would be a seven-months' child, and bustled off to boast of her foresight and take her share of the baby, who was, like all other babies, before and since, the common property of kindly neighbours.

She found sheepish Tom Brown very proud of his new dignity as a family man, and walking about with his hobnailed shoes off, that 't' mawther and choylde shud get a bit o' sleape,' he said, with a rough tenderness. But Mrs. Jinks knew better what they wanted than he;

and neither Tom, nor John Giles, who passed his time in winking over his beer in reply to all inquiries, could safely say their souls were their own for the next ten days, being despotically ruled by Mrs. Jinks. She had unconsciously mastered the theory of personal government so thoroughly, that neither speech nor thought was free under her. She was, as greater personages have been and are, the absolute mistress of an absolute king, who could neither hear, nor see, nor speak, and who was in all respects an infant with no will of his own.

The two men were very glad when Madge came down again with her baby in her arms, and after having been churched in the customary manner, went quietly about her duties.

Mrs. Jinks, however, having fairly earned her renown as a prophetess, was fully determined not to part with it, or to suffer it upon any account to become dimmed by disuse, and, therefore, she now predicted, that whenever a seven-months' child was born, it was a sure sign he would have an impatient temper.



## **BOOK II.**



## CHAPTER I.

## SWEET WILLIAM.

SOME difference of opinion had arisen at Wakefield-in-the-Marsh, where all the concerns of the parish belonged of right to the gossips, as to the name which should be given to the seven-months' child whose birth has been just recorded. Mr. Joyce was for having him called 'Benjamin,' and the sexton spoke with some authority in consequence of his connection with the church-yard—a place which few English persons have ever ventured to dissociate from the Church. Mrs. Jinks stood upon precedent, and declared that it had always been the custom at Wakefield, from time immemorial, to call a first child after the name of his grandfather, and John it was, and John 'it did ought fur to be.' The blacksmith said they might call him 'Harry' too, if they liked—a name which he had found good enough for working purposes; and these worthy

people had settled the whole thing between them, when Tom Brown, who had not been consulted, suggested it might be as well to ask his wife for her advice upon the subject, and he did so in a shy way peculiar to his uncouth, affectionate nature.

‘Twull be a grand christenin’, Madge,’ said Tom, touzling his shock head of hair, to get rid of some of his superfluous feelings without noise or disturbance.

Mrs. Brown, who was unusually pale and weak after her trouble, smiled faintly, but did not answer. She only cuddled her child closer, and rocked him on her breast by an almost imperceptible movement.

Presently Tom Brown put out his gigantic thumb, very slowly and timidly, pushing it forward a hair’s-breath at a time, till it touched the dimple, which was his son’s neck. ‘Pretty,’ said Tom Brown. It was nearly the only word of endearment he knew; but the honest fellow’s face was all aglow with pride and pleasure.

‘Tummus,’ murmured his wife very gently, ‘I’ve been a true lass to thee, Tummus.’

‘So thee hast, mawther; there bain’t no denyin’ on it.’

‘Tummus,’ said the young woman, again.

‘What’s your wull, Madge?’ asked her husband, tenderly.

‘Do ‘ee beleave in ghoastes?’ she inquired, with half-closed eyes.

‘Noa,’ answered Tom, rumpling his hair rather energetically, and then he added; ‘leastways, not onless thee dost, Madge.’

‘Twheer a ghoast, Tummus, I seed t’-noight thee didst trudge t’ Droninton with that there summut writ on peeaper.’

‘Wheer it, mawther?’ answered her husband in the tone in which one humours a child, for he had no definite ideas on the subject.

‘It wheer a ghoast, so it wheer, now, Tummus,’ repeated the woman, more confidently, and a light seemed to break over her face, as though she were just relieved of something that had lain heavy on her mind.

‘Let us dandle t’ choild a bit, Madge?’ said her husband after a while, and he opened his arms awkwardly to take the little rosy mass of humanity into them. Madge placed her treasure there for a moment, yet keeping anxious hold and watch over it. If it had cried or moved, she would have snatched it away and

hushed it in her bosom ; but the infant seemed soothed by the strong gentle touch of its father, and put its feeble knuckles in its eyes and smiled on him. Mother, father, and child were all linked together in Nature's own bonds by that cottage bed-side ; and there was a second birth of Love and Trust which happened to them, coming on quite silently and unperceived.

‘ What will 'ee carl thy choid, Madge ? ’ then whispered Tom Brown. ‘ Mrs. Jinks do say it should be John, Mrs. Jinks do.’

Madge considered this proposition for some minutes, but it did not seem to obtain favour with her, and a dreamy, ecstatic expression grew into her eyes while she mused. Suddenly her face seemed to smile all over, and she murmured as softly as the cooing of a dove.

‘ Un’s neeam shall be William, *Sweet William* ; he maun have no other neeam but that.’ Her poor ignorant, untaught mind, guided only by mother’s love, had made a short tremulous flight into the regions of romance. Many far-off sounds and echoes linger inexplicably in the memory, though we never heard them ; many seem a subtle part of our essence. A Lady Amabel Wyldwyl had composed one of the

sweetest lyrics of the 16th century, which remains a popular song to this day, and 'Sweet William' is the burthen of it. It was a curious coincidence, and the child was consequently christened William Brown.

The rite of baptism was duly performed, and the young Christian was formally admitted into the fold of the Church upon the following Sunday. John Giles, the blacksmith, and Mrs. Jinks jointly and severally renounced the pomps and vanities of the world on his behalf. Mr. Mowledy read the service so simply and touchingly that Mr. and Mrs. Brown and Harry Jinks found tears in their eyes when it was over, they knew not why; but Mrs. Jinks, who came out in great force upon the auspicious occasion, called them 'Molly Cawdles,' and indulged in the somewhat obstreperous hilarity which seems naturally to accompany the first and most solemn event of our lives.

## CHAPTER II.

## HERIOT SERVICE AND CUSTOM.

NOTHING more was heard of the strange huntsman, who had once dined and slept at the 'Chequers,' since he drove off from the roadside inn on that October morning ; and after a while all recollection of him passed away from the minds of the villagers at Wakefield-in-the-Marsh, as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day.

Thomas Brown and his wife had a numerous family besides their son William, and lived happily. But it was remarked that Madge lost her good looks soon after her marriage, and that she had a bad cough the following winter. She did not seem to get better during the succeeding spring or summer, and when the cold weather came on again she was visibly worse. She could not tell what was the matter with her. She felt no pain ; she was in no immediate

danger ; she had only a sense of something having been lost out of her life—an inward and spiritual emptiness—as if that were wanting to her nature which could never more be found. Like a plant growing in a soil unfavourable to its health and vigour, she drooped and could not come to maturity, though she lived on. The Dronington doctor, a merry old gentleman, was called in to see her, but could not make out that there was anything the matter ; so he recommended her port-wine, which he liked himself, and sent his apprentice to study that ‘singular case’ (which was not singular) ‘at the “Chequers” inn, out Wakefield way,’ so he said carelessly. The apprentice astonished Madge by feeling her pulse in black gloves, and looking at her through a pair of gold spectacles with blue glasses, out of which he could not see. He was a London tradesman’s son, who had a grave sense of his professional dignity. He sent her some mixture and pills of his own composition, in which acids and alkali were so curiously mingled, that the cork of the first supply blew off on the road, and the bottle, nicely labelled ‘Two tablespoonfuls three times a day,’ arrived empty. Then, taking a serious interest in her

case, he brought some pills, which looked, to Madge's rustic eyes, like swan-shot, and were said by the apprentice, in learned language, to contain iron ; but they had lain about so long in Dr. Bole's surgery drawer that they had lost all virtue, if they ever had any, or possibly the iron they contained had turned rusty and refused to act. The physician's art at best is but an experimental science : at worst it is a mere game of chance ; and country folk get doctored in a way which might astound the wise, if they were not too much occupied to think about it. The medicines prescribed for Madge did not do her any harm, because she did not take them ; and, possibly for the same reason, they did not do her any good. So she grew thinner every year, and, when little more than thirty, she looked almost an old woman. Country people generally age earlier than the dwellers in cities ; perhaps because the conditions of their lives are on the whole less healthy, perhaps because they lack the wine of longevity, which is amusement.

Also, it happened that while the young Browns increased as fast as nature would permit the process of their production to be carried on, the business at the 'Chequers' fell off. A

new line of railway between Dronington and London was opened, and a station was built at about three miles from Wakefield. It did not seem to make much difference at first. The farmers vowed they would never sit behind a tea-kettle while there was a nag in England ; the waggoners and the carriers crawled along the road as usual for a month or two ; but the coaches soon stopped, and in an incredibly short space of time one shame-faced bumpkin after another slunk off to the tea-kettle, and sent his produce to market by the same conveyance, till waggon and carrier's cart were seen no more.

John Giles' customers dwindled down to a few old cronies, and if his house had not been a copyhold, held at a peppercorn rent from the lord of the manor, he might have been obliged to move out of it. As it was, he and his contrived to do pretty well, though they seldom saw silver money, and now and then my lord's agent, or the squire's bailiff, as they rode through Wakefield to collect their rents, wondered that people should think themselves poor who had ten or twelve acres of garden and meadow-land round their house and a railway-station close by. But neither Giles nor

Tom Brown had an idea at this time that milk and cream, and eggs and butter, with their very potatoes and cabbages, might be sent to London at a profit. Indeed, John Giles died without being any better informed. One summer afternoon he refused his beer when Madge brought it to him as usual, and an hour afterwards was found quite dead, with the brown jug untouched before him.

He was scarcely buried before the lord of the manor turned up in the shape of one Mr. Sharpe, a London lawyer, whom Madge thought she had seen before, but could not recollect where. Mr. Sharpe claimed a heriot, which was in law originally a tribute given to the lord of the manor on occasion of his engaging in a war. It consisted of military furniture, or of horses and arms, as appears by the statutes of Canute (c. 69), which still have their share in the government of Britain: for although lords of manors in England do not any longer ostensibly engage in private warfare on their own account (save for business purposes and through an attorney), and therefore do not actually, and as a matter of fact, require *heer geld*, or heriot, yet with a commendable regard to their own

interests, and the interests of their heirs in tail, they have scrupulously adhered to the laudable practice of claiming both heriot service and custom ; the first of which is due by reservation in a grant or lease of lands, the other depends solely on immemorial usage, upheld by Wilkins, Spelman, and Blackstone. Therefore, as Mr. Sharpe acted for the trustees of Sir Richard Porteous, the feudal lord of Wakefield manor, he came diligently to search out the best horse, cow, or ox that the deceased tenant had died possessed of, and to carry off the same according to law for *heriot service*. Likewise he was entitled to seize by heriot custom any specific article of furniture or other valuable object on the premises. It might, and very often did happen, that the lord of a manor might take a valuable race-horse or a rich jewel worth more than his copyhold ; it formed also part of his tenant's estate, and the law courts delighted exceedingly in the interminable suits arising out of such pretensions. But in the present instance Mr. Sharpe only found in the way of live stock a blind old horse and a superannuated cow, of which he choose the latter, remarking that there was no part of her carcase which was not good

for something ; while, with respect to other goods and chattels, the most valuable thing at the inn was Madge's large box in which she put her work. It was an oaken chest, which sounded hollow when struck, though it was apparently full ; it was rather curiously carved, with a Duke's coronet engraved in brass upon the lid, and beneath it, in old English letters, the initials 'C. & R.' Madge gave it up rather unwillingly, and transferred its contents to the topmost of a roomy chest of drawers ; not without reflections, which had long slept in her memory. As she did so, the crumpled piece of paper which the stranger had given her fell to the ground, and she knew now, from more mature experience, that it was a ten-pound note. She looked at it long and wistfully, her countenance growing dark and dejected ; but it cleared up again, as it had done on that day after her confinement, and shaking off her sombre thoughts, she wrapped up the money carefully in a stocking for good luck, putting it under lock and key. But she thought a great deal of this money. It was the largest sum she had ever seen, and it assumed an exaggerated importance in her eyes, as though it were a

fortune with which something might be done, if ever the time came. 'That there be William's money. It shall bide till he needs it,' she said to herself, and went downstairs to cut ten hunks of bread-and-butter for her progeny.

## CHAPTER III.

YOUNG BROWN.

THEY were chubby-faced urchins, with flaxen hair, rosy cheeks, and blue eyes, English peasant children, sturdy of limb and loud of roar : stolid children, who made sudden noises like the bellowing of young bulls when they wanted anything, or were moved to joy or sorrow. They eat silently and long ; they inhaled deep breaths of skimmed milk, half a pint at a time. They appeared to have almost a solemn sense of the goodness of eating, and masticated their food as if they were ruminating over the observance of a religious custom. Perhaps it is the usage of saying grace before and after meals which often gives to our peasantry that notable gravity of demeanour when eating ; perhaps it is really an inward and spiritual thanksgiving for bread, going on in the hearts of those who often hear how hard it is to come by.

‘ Wheer be ower Will, mawther ? ’ asked

one of the boys, shyly ducking his head down and looking away while speaking, after the manner of English poor children.

William Brown's mess was the largest and daintiest, his hunk of bread was the best buttered, and his mug, marked 'A fairing from Dronington,' was filled with new milk fresh from the cow, upon pretence that there was no more skimmed milk, though there was a whole pannful in the dairy. But William himself was not at the table.

'I knows wheer he be,' cried a little girl, showing her ragged teeth from ear to ear, and sniggering as if she was being tickled.

'Wheer be he now, Madge?' asked her mother, tying on the small damsel's pinafore more firmly round her plump freckled neck.

'Will's a been bird's-nestin' agin, and t' keeper saies there be steel-traps in Sur Richard's copsis,' growled a surly mite, aged six, hanging his head below his chest.

'Mawther,' squeaked little Madge, 'theer be our Will. He jumped over the wall and knocked daewn two lipe abbleytots,' added the child, seriously.

'Tell-tale-tit,  
Your tongue shall be slit,'

yelped the children in chorus, and Madge began to cry ; when William Brown entered, carrying three trout wrapped up in fresh grass, and the two apricots he had shaken from their stalks as he vaulted over the garden wall.

He was an extraordinary handsome lad, not at all like his brothers and sisters. They were clumsy, thick-set louts and hoydens. He was tall and slim and straight. He towered as he walked with a firm elastic step, and his shapely head, well set upon his flat shoulders, looked round from side to side with the airy grace of a stag. He was admirably built to endure fatigue. His chest was rather deep than broad. His limbs had not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon them, and were hard as iron. He could jump farther, run faster, than any lad in the county of his age. He was nearly seventeen years old, but, like most dark persons, he looked in early youth much older than he was. He had his mother's features, the same delicately-shaped, haughty nostrils, and large purple eyes, the same full, handsome mouth ; but his hair was black as the raven's plume, and there was not the faintest resemblance between him and honest Tom Brown, who sat eating his supper

with tranquil satisfaction in a corner of the old kitchen, where his offspring were so busy with mug and platter.

‘Here, father,’ said William, in a clear, bold voice, and looking straight before him with the fearless glance of a young eagle, ‘I have brought you a brace of trout for supper, if mother will fry them for you. I have been fishing in the mill-stream with Mr. Mowledy.’ Indeed, Master William was generally fishing of an afternoon with the Curate, who had taught him to read and write, though he was not a very apt scholar, and had taken a deep interest in him, for reasons of which his mother only guessed the well-kept secret.

‘An thee bist wi’ ower parson, Willum, it be arl roight,’ remarked Tom Brown; ‘unly dunnot go fur to get into no trubble along of Sir Richard’s keepers. There’s that there Mr. Sharpe, I’ve a heerd say, him as carr’d off the dun cow, has all the hares counted and sent up to Lunnon town fur sale. It wunnut do fur to tutch a hair of their tails, Willum, boy.’

‘I knocked over a puss yesterday, father, with old Moody’s blunderbuss, but I gave it to Ned Reeve, the under-keeper, who asked me to

make a killing fly for him this month, and I did ; and we are going out rabbiting with my ferrets some day,' said the boy, gaily.

' I dunnot say no, Willum,' answered his father, putting his hands into that shock head of hair of his according to his wont when puzzled. ' Unly do 'ee give that theer lawyer Sharpe a wide berth. He's a bad 'un, that he be, Willum —leastways, no offence to you, my lad.'

There was a curious and probably involuntary tone of deference in the manner of the father towards his eldest son. Tom Brown's paternal feelings were really mingled with a good deal of inarticulate astonishment that he should have begotten such a son ; and he often wondered that a seven-months' child should be so straight, and tall, and strong. Seven-months' children, he had heard, were generally weak and sickly, whereas William could leap, standing, over a five-barred gate, handle a scythe in clover as if his lithe arms were made of the same steel as the blade of it. The boy could keep pace with the Cloudesdale hounds across country, and get in at the death of a fox without blowing an extra breath, or springing a sinew, after a burst of forty minutes over hill and

valley. He could break a thorough-bred horse, and *make* him, riding as the crow flies, without flinching ; and Ned Hieover, the Dronington dealer, was for ever trying to get hold of the boy to show his cattle well in front. He could throw a wrong-headed colt for the farrier, and Harry Jinks never felt quite at home in his forge without William, who passed much time with the blacksmith and his family, for reasons hereinafter mentioned. He could fight too, and did so freely, knocking his brothers' heads together as though they were nine-pins, if the young bumpkins showed signs of impudence or insubordination, and he had lately thrashed a waggoner, six feet high and three feet broad, with extreme skill and coolness ; having taken lessons with the gloves at an early period of his existence (*mirabile dictu*) from Mr. Mowledy ! In fact, the boy was as bold and active as a lion's whelp, which astonished lethargic Thomas his father, and filled him with a respect half comic, half touching, for this remarkable seven-months' child, who was, nevertheless, beyond doubt or question, his own offspring.

The boy promised to pay attention to his father's warning, and then the trout having

been fried, and the supper over, the children trooped out into the fields ; all of them gathering naturally round William Brown as the central figure of the group. They stopped at their accustomed trysting-place, which was a large duck-pond of considerable width and depth, with a weeping-willow drooping over it. There were some noble elm and oak trees growing near in a shady sylvan lane, and the birds, rejoicing in the summer, sang amidst their branches, for it still wanted two full hours of sunset. The urchins went about their games, one to his taws, the other to his sticklebacks, while William Brown leaned against a grand old oak, and, taking out a clasp-knife, which the Curate had given him upon his birthday, carved a name deeply into the bark of the tree.

## CHAPTER IV.

## AN IDYL.

Two of his brothers, Jack and Gill, or Giles, were swinging on a gate near him, and playing at odd and even. When they tired of this pastime, says Jack to Gill,—

‘I wushes as ‘ow ‘t wheer Sunday.’

‘Wheerfur, naew?’ asked Giles.

‘It be pudden-day, bain’t un?’ answered Jack, laconically ; for he already felt some returns of appetite, though a glistening crumb of bread-and-butter was still on his nether lip.

‘Oi dunno,’ observed Giles, dubiously. ‘One Sunday theer worn’t no pudden ; mawther she gien us goozburry-fule.’

‘Willie,’ shouted Jack, appealing to a higher tribunal, in hope and fear, ‘bain’t Sunday pudden-day?’

‘He dunno an’ he doan’t keer, Willum, he doan’t,’ remarked Giles, kicking the dust up

with the iron-bound toe of his stumpy little foot, as he swung his brother backwards and forwards on the gate.

‘What do ‘ee keer fur, Willum?’ asked Jack, slyly.

‘Mother,’ answered the boy, slowly, ‘and the miller’s old horse he bought of us last year.’

‘Then what fur beest thee allus cuttin’ Sally Jinks’s neam upon the trees? I’ve seed it on a matter o’ six trees here about,’ said Giles, demurely.

‘Hoigh!’ bawled Jack, measuring his length headlong upon the ground, ‘I wull gi’e thee a walluppin’, Gill, if thee lets go the gate agin.’

‘No, thee wun’t,’ whines Gill. ‘I’ll go whoam and tell mawther!’

‘I’ll pitch you both into the pond if you bain’t still,’ interposed William, and the two brats were as quiet as mice till they had slid off the gate and got out of reach, when they set up bawling, and scuddled away like hares.

When they had gone back whooping into the house, William Brown shut his knife, and began to whistle very sweetly an old English tune, ‘Where are you going to, my pretty maid?’

The boy whistled it all through, and then

over again, the clear musical notes ringing very pleasantly in the still evening air. Then he changed his tune for another old song, 'Whistle and I'll come to thee, my lad.' He had scarcely got through the first bars of it when a rosy face, like an animated flower, peeped over the nearest hedge, and a buxom little lass, with milk-white teeth and round, bright, wondering eyes, tripped lightly up to him.

'What makes thee so late, Sally?' said the boy, with an unspoken reproach in his voice.

'Mother sent me with these new-laid eggs to your mother for those she lent us on Monday,' answered the girl, panting, 'and I was obliged to hunt for them, I can tell you.'

She put her basket under a tree in a safe place, and they sat down together, with their arms round each other like two children, as they were. She nestled very close to him, and presently she began to lecture him, with an apparent sense of womanly proprietorship, very grave and delicious in so young and sweet a maiden. She told him he must not go into Sir Richard's preserves, even to gather wild-flowers for her; and that he must be a good boy for ever and ever. He assured her that he would

endeavour to be a pattern of excellence in every respect, provided she would always promise that they should live together when they grew up, accompanied by their fathers and mothers, and that she would never by any chance or circumstance consent to be separated from him for a day. It was godly, innocent talk, and the bee, type of honest, peaceful toil, as it sped humming on its way to the hive, and the little wren, which is heaven's messenger, perhaps listened to it approvingly.

As the summer evening wore on, the girl, with her basket beside her, drew still closer to the stately boy, and asked him to sing her a song that he had learned from a wandering sailor last harvest-home. It was a simple ballad, such as are sung round kitchen fires by the jolly tramps who wander through the country, and are as ready to give a song for a supper as in the days of minstrel and crusader. The boy sang it, too, very fairly, for the Curate had taught him to lead the choir at the village church.

#### THE SAILOR'S RETURN.

##### I.

'Twas on a summer's evening,  
The corn was ripening then,  
And I had just returned from sea,  
Three voyages and ten.

We'd fought against the Spaniard,  
The Frenchman and the Dane,  
And both my hands were full of gold,  
With prizes from the main.  
I asked her if she would be mine :  
She smiled ; but then she sighed,  
And the new-born Hope within me,  
It laid it down and died.  
I went away to sea again,  
I did not speak one word,  
And the beating of my own heart  
Was the only sound I heard.

## II.

My Mary she had golden hair,  
Her eyes were blue and bright,  
Her voice was like the little bird's  
That warbles in the night.  
She was my only true love,  
\* \* \*

There were half-a-dozen verses more to the same effect before all ended happily between the lovers. The girl joined her voice to William's, and their notes mingled together in a rich tenor and a clear soprano, rising and falling in the sweet monotonous cadences of most home-made English songs. They were so occupied with their music and each other that they did not notice Harry Jinks, the girl's father, who now stood with his stalwart arms resting on the gate, and watching them with a puzzled,

thoughtful glance, not quite free from anxiety, but very kind and friendly; he having full trust in the handsome young lad, and his daughter. Presently he spoke.

‘It wun’t do, Willie. It wun’t do. Thee hast got no brass, and thee bist too young a chap to go sweetheartsing yet awhile. Do ’ee come along of me, Sally! ’

He, Mr. Jinks, was Reality, who sent pretty Romance off to bed with a flea in her ear as usual. It was really a pity.

## CHAPTER V.

## PARENTAL AUTHORITY.

FATHERS and mothers usually mean well by their children ; but they have in certain respects an unfortunate resemblance to kings and queens. They have power to do unpleasant things with virtuous intentions, but no control whatever over those events which must inevitably carry their designs into effect, or, as more commonly happens, frustrate and laugh them to scorn. It rarely chances that the measures which authority, even when most thoughtful and benignant, takes to enforce happiness upon those who are under its influence, lead to any beneficial result. Thus if honest Harry Jinks, who meant no harm to his daughter but rather good, had gone on never minding, young Brown and the girl would have done their sweet-hearting in a comfortable manner, married in due time, and settled at Wakefield-in-the-Marsh.

This would certainly have been the best and most profitable termination of the business for Harry Jinks, blacksmith and farrier of this parish. But English people generally, and the English peasantry in particular, appear to think that there is something wrong about love-making, and that, in the case of their own children, the commencements of it should be surlily watched and sullenly checked. It is a great blunder. There would be much more joy and peace in the world if the hearts of young folk were encouraged to develope themselves in a natural way without shame or concealment. The characters of girls are often hopelessly ruined, they become false, cunning, and altogether abominable creatures, because they are forced to hide their feelings. For the same reason, some boys turn out utter reprobates. A monstrous deal of nonsense has been said and written with a grave face against early marriages. It is all wicked cruelty as well as nonsense. Young men and maids can no more be forbidden to love than flowers can be commanded not to blossom or trees to put forth no leaves. It is, of course, always possible to cut off the buds as they appear and leave an ugly

stump ; locusts too may eat away tender foliage, but this, when done, is only destruction, not cure.

The blacksmith's daughter was a very pretty girl, very good and very housewifely. She would have made an excellent helpmate a year or two later, which would have been quite as soon as she or her unconscious lover would have thought of marriage. William Brown would have done as well at Wakefield-in-the-Marsh as he did when driven away from it, by the blacksmith's awkward way of taking time by the forelock, and putting his little world out of gear by this stolid and unintelligent behaviour. The Curate had taught him the rudiments of education ; he could read and write very fairly ; he knew a little of history ; he had a clear head for figures, and had more than once surprised Mr. Mowledy by his extraordinary aptitude for drawing. It was not the genius of an artist for the picturesque—the boy had little or nothing of the poet in him ; he could not hit off a portrait—the mocking devil of the caricaturist had never entered his mind. What he could do was this : he could take up a pen or a pencil and make a rapid sketch of a landscape from

memory, leaving out no detail of importance, and marking hill and valley, stream and field, with amazing clearness and accuracy of detail. He could draw trees and houses too, though not so well, and the boy's truthful mind was so entirely wanting in imaginative fripperies, that when his drawings were closely examined it would be found that they were strict reproductions of facts. He had neither added nor taken away anything, but merely represented his model with complete fidelity. Such a lad must infallibly have grown up to be somebody and something. He would probably have joined the county yeomanry and first got into notice that way ; then, as he had the fortunate gift of making friends, and was a frank, modest, serviceable young fellow who could do a hundred handy things and was too strong-hearted, as well as too good-natured, to take offence, some place in the many niches of old England's homes would surely have been found for him. Merit of any useful kind, which is not made up of pretence and vanity or advertisements, is so scarce and precious a commodity, that those who want it are certain to seek it out and cherish and pay it handsomely. There is no such thing as un-

rewarded talent of the practical sort ; from the moment it is known to be really worth something, and not wholly a sham, fair fortunes follow it. All this boy wanted was a start, and that never fails any one who waits for it without losing his temper. No matter when or where his start was made he would win the race, for he would run it amidst well-wishers, and no enemy would lay in wait to trip him up or set traps for him. He might have begun life as a village Jack-of-all-trades ; but in any case, supposing he lived the average term of human existence, he would end it in wealth and honour, barring accidents.

What a lucky thing it would have been for Harry Jinks and his daughter, if the blacksmith could have seen into the future, and left a childish courtship to take its course, and ripen into domestic happiness. But he was as blind as we all are. Just when we should be taking our clearest view, and so soon as a bright prospect opens before us, our eyes are darkened and we cannot discern it. Some impudent elf or spirit of mischief steals round us, and insists on leading us astray, by tweaks and pinches, till when we are almost too tired to move hand or

foot, he takes us back whence we started, reveals the beauties we have neglected and abandoned by the latest gleams of sunset, and the last thing we hear as night closes over us is the sound of his scoffing laughter as he leaves us duped and sorrowful.

Twenty years passed away before William Brown spoke again to his first sweetheart. She was then a washerwoman at a watering-place, having missed her road in life under her father's careful guidance, and married a sot for a small business, which went to ruin and left her a widow with eight small children at thirty years of age ; when it was too late for her to begin again in her own way, poor lost body.

## CHAPTER VI.

## GOOD FOR NOTHING.

WILLIAM BROWN, being deprived of his mate, went about very much like other young fellows in similar circumstances. He took to leaning against posts a good deal, and he who was once the blithest lad in all the country side began to mope and be idle. He could not settle down to anything. He did not know when to go to bed or when to get up. His occupation was gone, and with it all the zest and pleasure of life. A few days ago whatever he might be doing had some reference to Sarah Jinks, and was mentally judged by her standard of comparison. If he was about any garden work he would think when he should have finished it that he might look in at Mrs. Jinks's cottage and talk a bit with Sally. If he found a large gooseberry on a tree, or twin flowers on one stalk, or if he dug out a curious stone or an old coin

(the inn garden had been a battle field in the Wars of the Roses, and many such relics were turned up at odd times), he put them aside to show her in the evening as a subject for conversation. When he took his reading lesson from Mr. Mowledy, he always tried to remember any narrative which made an impression on his mind in order to repeat it to her, and he had taught the girl to read and write a little herself. Now all this was over. If he worked in the garden it was only digging with a spade or hoeing with a hoe. His readings were mere starings without purpose into a book. What he liked best was to lie down flat under a tree, with his head buried in his arms, and think of Sally hour after hour in a day-dream. Then, as he could not sleep at night, but lay awake hot and feverish, he got up and wandered round the blacksmith's cottage that he might catch sight of Sally when she went out with her milk-pail early. But the second morning after he had devised this stratagem, gaunt Harry himself appeared with the pail and milked his cow in person. Sally had been packed off crying the afternoon before in the carrier's cart, to pass a few months at Dronington with

a silly old aunt who kept a small mercer's shop, and Willie saw her no more at Wakefield.

It was about this time too that the boy, grown reckless and rebellious against his elders, fell into indifferent company, and the miller told his friend the Curate that Sir Richard's head-keeper was on the look out for him. It was a period of agricultural distress, and the stump oratory which arises out of it. There was a loud outcry against the Game Laws, and consequently a number of poachers about. They did not think the stealing of hares and pheasants criminal, but rather gloried in it among themselves. Young Brown, who was now generally mooning about the woods, fell in with some of those poachers, who were mostly pleasant adventurous fellows, and he felt a growing fancy for their society. One day the boy astonished his father by holding forth suddenly at dinner about 'the rights of the people ;' he did not understand in the least what he said, but he had caught the wild radical jargon of the time, as a parrot learns to swear,

The Curate noticed all these things with a heavy heart, for Mr. Mowledy loved the boy whom he fancied ought to have been his son,

and might have been had events turned out otherwise than they had done. He understood only too well the cause of the change which had all at once come over the character and conduct of the well-conditioned boy whom he had taught so carefully ; for silent and reserved as William Brown might be with every one else, he told his secret to the Curate very frankly. Mr. Mowledy even called upon the blacksmith, and felt his ground to see if it would bear a cautious step or two ; but there is a notable difference between the Protestant clergy and their Roman Catholic brethren. The English pastor is jealously excluded from the private family affairs of his flock. He is a person connected with the Church and the Sunday coat, and must never be listened to apart from them. It comes from the fact that our University-bred clergy have little fellow feeling and less community of thought with the peasantry ; whereas the Catholic clergy are often only peasants themselves, and feel and think with their own class.

The reverend gentleman having been therefore rebuffed rather rudely at the blacksmith's when he went to plead the cause of his young friend and fellow fisherman in a discreet way,

so as to obtain time and favour for him, was wending his way disconsolately homeward, when he met Mr. Sharpe, with a leather bag in his hand, coming from the railway.

Mr. Sharpe had now all the affairs of Sir Richard Porteous and his brother in hand. He received the rents of the estate, cut down timber as fast as it was ready for the axe, and paid the Curate's stipend with somewhat more regularity than it had ever been paid before ; though he deducted income tax which was not due upon it, and took off the price of a receipt stamp which he did not affix to the Curate's acknowledgment for the money ; and these were things which would never have occurred to the large and generous soul of Dr. Porteous. On the contrary, whenever that polished member of the superior clergy had felt the necessity of deducting anything from his curate's stipend, he had preferred to retain the whole of it in his own hands rather than bring his gentlemanly mind down to the consideration of vulgar fractions with his 'Reverend friend and colleague,' as he courteously called his subordinate at such times. On the whole, however, the Curate preferred the less polite, but more business-like practice of

Mr. Sharpe ; and regular payments on the one hand, unresisting submission to petty peculation on the other, had gradually established between them a satisfactory state of affairs, which looked almost like friendship at a little distance. Certainly they both wished each other well : the Curate because he never wished ill to any living thing (except worms, which he had schooled himself to impale on philanthropic principles), and Mr. Sharpe because there really was no reason why he should go out of his way to do the Curate an ill turn while it was more convenient and respectable to be on good terms with him ; and Mr. Sharpe was too shrewd not to understand the value of a blameless clergyman's good will.

It was not that Mr. Mowledy did not see through him. A reverend gentleman who was once stroke in his college eight, and a junior student of Christchurch, Oxford, cannot altogether forget the experiences of his youth. He knew very well that the lawyer was a rogue who cheated him of a few shillings every quarter ; but he had also worldly wisdom or charity enough (they are nearly the same qualities) to shut his eyes to the small robbery,

and signed his name every three months to the strips of paper in duplicate which the attorney presented for his signature, as though he did not notice the figures upon them. Mr. Sharpe had sometimes an uneasy suspicion that the pale-faced scholar was not quite a fool, but he deadened his conscience with a few loud civil words as he pouched the trumpery theft. He was a fellow who did not look to see if there was mud upon a shilling when he picked it up.

‘How de’ do, Reverend gent? how de do, sir?’ said Mr. Sharpe heartily as they met, but though this dog seemed to bark honestly enough his eyes were shifty, and he was secretly ill at ease in a gentleman’s company.

Mr. Mowledy answered with the mild good taste natural to him, though an almost imperceptible smile played for an instant about the corners of his mouth and then died away, as though reproved by the presence of that august and beautiful charity which sat enthroned on the ample brow of this lowly priest.

Then Mr. Sharpe’s mind turning instinctively to money as needs it must, reminded the Curate that to-morrow was ‘pay-day.’

‘Nothing comes round so fast as pay-day

to the master, or so slow to the man,' said Mr. Sharpe.

Mr. Mowledy internally acknowledged the justice of this delicate remark, for having lately had to pay his rent he had only two sovereigns left in his purse, and he was about to send off one of them as his annual contribution to the Bible Society; the only way he had of doing good with his small means, so he thought, and he trusted that the Eternal Master when he came might find his single talent well employed.

'Penny a pound more put on the income tax, Reverend Sir, which will make just one and threepence less this quarter on your account.'

'Truly, a penny a pound deducted from fifteen pounds diminishes the sum by fifteen pence,' answered the Curate, with a slight contraction of the brows more like an expression of pain than displeasure. He was involuntarily ashamed that a man with an immortal soul should be so base.

'Ah, your Reverence,' said Mr. Sharpe, awkwardly trying to shift the load of his infamy on to other shoulders, 'if I had my way I would knock off that tax on your income, and I told

Dr. Porteous' it was wrong to take it. But the doctor is terribly loose in his accounts, and he observed with considerable shrewdness that the value of the living is unquestionably more than the sum fixed by the Income Tax Commissioners for exemption, and therefore it was only right that you should pay your share of it.'

'I am content to do so. I did not venture to make any observation on the subject.'

'No, sir,' replied Mr. Sharpe, 'I cannot say you ever did, either now or at any other time; but if you will allow me to make the remark, you looked as if you could say a good deal if you were inclined to do so. So could I; but Lord love you, sir, Dr. Porteous has got holes in both pockets.'

'I am not aware that I referred to him,' replied the Curate, unwilling to be betrayed into hearing one unkind word against his patron; and Mr. Sharpe having eased his mind of its difficulty about the one and threepence, consented cheerfully to change the conversation. His next words, however, startled Mr. Mowledy out of all self control.

'I've come down to Wakefield this fine afternoon, though I was not due till to-morrow,'

observed Mr. Sharpe, cheerfully, 'partly because I was a little off my feed, and wanted some country air; partly because I am going to take out a warrant against young Brown for poaching.'

'A warrant!' echoed Mr. Mowledy, turning very pale. 'Surely not. There is no harm in the boy. He is merely a love-sick lad, who is idling about just now; but his parents are honest people and would not countenance his doing anything wrong, nor is the boy himself badly inclined.'

'Humph!' mused Mr. Sharpe, pursing up his lips thoughtfully. 'He has been seen with a set of radical chaps who go about snaring pheasants, wiring hares, and spouting sedition. That does not look much like a good boy, your Reverence.'

'I admit, sir,' replied the Curate with ill-concealed anxiety, 'that the boy's conduct for some weeks past has not been all I could desire: but I shall esteem it as a personal favour, a favour demanding no ordinary gratitude, if you will show him indulgence on this occasion, and accept my assurance that he will never offend again.'

‘Ah, that is all very well, your Reverence, but pheasants are selling at 3s. 6d. a head in London, and Sir Richard’s estate is very much embarrassed. Now as every acre of it is entailed and we cannot get hold of the next heir-at-law should he survive the doctor, we must not cut off the entail or sell a foot of ground, so we are obliged to make the most of all the produce for the creditors’ sake. I’m trying now to let off the farms at nominal rents, on long leases, with fines, or what we Londoners call premiums, for entering into possession. They tell me the land will suffer, and the farmers will take all they can out of it and put nothing in, but I can’t help that. We must make what we can out of it during Sir Richard’s life, which ain’t worth much, I hear we shall never get a sixpence afterwards, beyond his insurances. So I’ve had the pheasants numbered, and there are six-and-twenty missing this week.’

‘If the value of a few birds recently missed from the preserves will induce you to act leniently by the boy Brown, will you kindly permit me to ask you to be so good as to deduct it from the stipend which is coming to me to-morrow?’ urged the Curate, entreatingly.

‘Well, your Reverence, business is business,’ replied Mr. Sharpe, ‘but if I let him off this time he will be at it again ; and then you know if you don’t pay the damage I must.’

‘Nay,’ pleaded the poor parson, ‘I will take care that whoever poaches on Sir Richard’s preserves, William Brown shall not do so. I will make him promise me to refrain, if he has ever been guilty of this offence in pursuit of sport rather than from the desire of gain ; and I know I can rely on his word.’

‘Twenty-six pheasants at three shillings and sixpence a head makes just four pounds eleven,’ remarked Mr. Sharpe, rapidly totting up some figures on his thumb-nail with a pencil, ‘and shall we say one pound nine for hares, number unknown, to make even money.’

‘That will make six pounds,’ said the Curate, wincing slightly.

‘And I shall have just nine sovs. less the income-tax, to pay your Reverence,’ observed Mr. Sharpe, briskly.

They walked on together in silence for some minutes after this ; and then Mr. Sharpe said good-humouredly, but rather hardly, “Your Reverence seems to take an interest in young Brown.”

‘Yes,’ answered the Curate, ‘I do take a very great interest in him. He is a pupil of mine, and a lad of considerable promise. Upright, honest, bright-witted, brave, and resolute; rather an uncommon character. He will, I think, make his mark in life.’

‘Whew!’ whistled Mr. Sharpe, and then he added meaningly, ‘Well, your Reverence, take a fool’s advice, and keep the boy out of mischief. It isn’t any particular business of mine just now to get him into trouble, indeed it is just possible that my interest may lie some day quite in a different direction, and I may find it suit me to do him a good turn. But there may be—mind, I do not say there are—several people who would not be sorry to see him got out of the way, and all his whole family too, for the matter of that.’

‘You amaze me,’ said the Curate. ‘I have lived here now many years, and I never knew them do harm to any one.’

‘Very likely,’ remarked Mr. Sharpe, drily. ‘By the way, your Reverence, did you ever see any of the Duke of Courthope’s people about here?’

‘No,’ replied the Curate, very far indeed off the scent, for, like most single-minded and

honest people, he was utterly guileless and unsuspicious. Dr. Porteous mentioned to me, I remember, that his Grace had some interest in Sir Richard's estate.'

'Oh no, he hasn't,' returned Mr. Sharpe. 'I bought up all the Bart.'s debts secured upon property or income ten years ago; and the Duke's solicitors had taken good care of him. They were a shrewd old firm—Messrs. Deodand and Mortmain. The Duke still employs them in conveyancing; and they had secured to him by a deed of assignment nearly the whole revenue of this rectory.'

## CHAPTER VII.

## A RECRUIT.

THE Curate took leave of Mr. Sharpe on the mutual understanding that no more would be heard of the warrant against William Brown, and then he set off for a long walk into a neighbouring parish, where his brother curate was sick, in order to arrange some means by which he could perform double duty on the following Sunday without slight or injury to his own congregation.

As he walked his mind was rather bent upon secular than ecclesiastical matters. In the first place he could not conceive the idea that any one should seriously desire to injure such humble people as the Brown family, yet he had quite knowledge of the world enough to understand that a practical London solicitor like Mr. Sharpe would not be disposed to give him such a warning without sufficient reason, and as he loved

the boy with all the yearning affection of a childless and lonely man, this warning made him very uneasy. He resolved to speak to Thomas Brown himself about it, and take counsel with that north countryman, who was canny though so silent; and notwithstanding the fact that he had never trusted himself alone in Madge's presence since they parted that winter's evening in the Glebe meadows, yet he thought he would speak to her now, and inquire if she knew or could guess at anything which would throw a light on this mystery.

He was walking on absorbed in these thoughts when his attention was attracted by a tall handsome man in the military uniform of a crack cavalry regiment. He had streamers of gaily-coloured ribbons in his forage cap; his buttons and spurs glittered like burnished silver. He carried a gilt-headed riding whip under his arm, and was a very fine fellow indeed. Three louts in smock frocks, also with ribbons in their hats stood near him, and one youth of a better class sat with his head in his hands at the table of the road-side alehouse where they were assembled. These were recruits for her Majesty's service. In order to obtain them, the United

Kingdom was at this period divided into districts in charge of recruiting officers who were gentlemen ; but the actual enlistment of recruits was carried on by non-commissioned officers under them. The acceptance of a shilling from a recruiting sergeant as an earnest of the Queen's bounty, constituted an act of enlistment, and the practice of obtaining recruits at a public house, where the non-commissioned officer lied and got drunk freely for his country's good, was very general at that time ; as it seems to be still. Indeed the system in full force was to catch bumpkins by the aid of flattery and strong drink ; and then to tell them what was not true in order to prevent any attempt upon their part to escape. The non-commissioned officer got paid so much a head per bumpkin, and was frequently the expertest liar in the regiment. He was well aware that there were certain laws and acts of parliament against his merry proceedings, but he artfully contrived that they should remain a dead letter, by inventing the most marvellous narratives and keeping up a wonderful halo of deception in the bumpkin's mind, till he found himself fast fixed in uniform, with a sabre or a bayonet at his side.

Mr. Mowledy saw at a glance what had happened. The lad, who sat with his head bowed upon his hands at the alehouse table, was young Brown.

The Curate walked straight up to his pupil, and the dashing sergeant, at once recognising his profession by the straightly-cut black coat and white cravat which marks it so distinctly even in Protestant countries, stood up and saluted.

‘ William ! ’ said the Curate, in a voice very firm but very gentle. ‘ It is I, Mr. Mowledy, your friend. Look up and tell me what has happened.’

The boy’s shoulders shook as if he were sobbing, and he held his head tighter in his hands for some seconds, but when he looked up his eyes were quite dry, and he met the Curate’s gaze steadily as one who felt he had nothing to be ashamed of, though his face was flushed and his lip trembled.

‘ What is your regiment, sergeant ? ’ asked the Curate, in that unconscious tone of command which all English gentlemen adopt towards their inferiors in social rank ; a tone which belongs to a people whose nobles are still powerful, a

tone which is perhaps natural to all conquering races.

‘The 1st Lancers, sir,’ answered the sergeant, saluting again from habit, and instinctively obeying the unexpressed order the gentleman had addressed to him.

‘I am glad to hear it,’ replied the Curate, ‘and please to remember that I know your colonel, and that you will have to answer to me for this recruit. You are aware that he cannot be attested before a magistrate till twenty-four hours have elapsed from his enlistment.’

‘Quite aware of it, sir,’ replied the sergeant civilly, and he saluted again.

‘Your head-quarters are, I suppose, at Dronington?’ continued the Curate, interrogating the sergeant as if he had been his commanding officer.

‘Yes, sir,’ answered the sergeant, standing as straight as a dart in the attitude of attention.

‘Thank you,’ said the Curate; then turning to young Brown, he said affectionately, ‘William, I shall see you again to-night.’

## CHAPTER VIII.

SO BE IT.

A FEW weeks previous Mr. Mowledy would have been deeply and permanently grieved to see the bright lad he had educated sink into a common soldier. Even now he was surprised and shocked, perhaps also a little displeased ; though the Curate was a patriot, and in an invasion or in any time of public trouble, would have shewn himself a worthy member of the church militant. But at the period at which this story has now arrived there existed an opinion among most respectable English persons that a military life was little better than penal servitude. In truth, though officers in the army have alway made a fine appearance at county balls, the trade of soldiering has never been very popular amongst us, except when the tents of Napoleon Bonaparte were pitched within sight of the British coast at Boulogne. John

Bull is not an imaginative old gentleman. It is no use telling him of a possible or probable danger; he laughs at it angrily or contemptuously, according to his humour. But he understands peril when it is close to him, and he can see and feel it. Only shew him a band of robbers actually coming to look after his strong box, and at once he begins to feel a mighty respect for its defenders. At other times he is all for peace, retrenchment, and universal philanthropy; so he calls his soldiers man-butchers, and sneers with a wise far-sighted prudence at their drill and accoutrements. He even goes so far as to say that they are drones who eat up the produce of other men's labour. Wonderful elderly person, our mutual friend John, when he gives us a piece of his mind, and we are able to notice at our leisure that it is such a very different piece to that which he gave us yesterday.

Mr. Mowledy had a full share of the prejudices belonging to the generation and society in which he lived. He thought it a foolish thing for a young man of clear head and good character to enlist as a soldier; and unconsciously following a peculiarly English mode of

reasoning, he considered it not only social degradation for a village innkeeper's son to become a British warrior, but also he was of opinion that to march about a barrack yard in goose step was the business of a human gander simply because there was neither money nor credit to be got out of it.

Circumstances, however, proverbially alter cases. William Brown, a quiet, well-conducted lad, reading, writing, cyphering, and doing his duty in an unobtrusive way, with prosperity in prospect, was a very different person to William Brown the companion of doubtful associates, and with a warrant out against him for poaching. Mr. Mowledy did not think that his friend was guilty on this count, nor was he ; still it is an awkward thing to fall under suspicion, and a Justice of the Peace with a proper respect for the Game Laws would not weigh too nicely the question whether he was innocent or culpable, but would commit him to prison as a wholesome warning to the country round. It was a critical period in the boy's life ; he had been crossed in love ; he might do something foolish in desperation or recklessness, and drift on from bad to worse. Upon the whole, therefore, it

would not be a bad thing if he was put for a few years under strict discipline. No harm was likely to happen to him that way, and much good. Moreover, Colonel Oakes, one of the best soldiers and gentlemen who ever sat in a cavalry saddle, commanded the 1st Lancers, and Colonel Oakes was an old schoolfellow of Mr. Mowledy. The Curate knew that a few lines to him would secure the boy a good reception in the regiment and a friend at head-quarters, advantages which he would very likely turn to satisfactory account; and—who could tell—perhaps things after all had turned out for the best, as they commonly do if we put a smiling face on them.

So Mr. Mowledy, having settled matters satisfactorily with his colleague in the next parish, walked rapidly back to Wakefield with those long sliding strides which cover so much ground and which are, I think, peculiar to the clerical profession.

He broke the news with instinctive delicacy to Madge, and sat down to talk with her for the first time during seventeen long years. Her husband was out doing some field work, and the Curate found himself alone with that old unspoken love, now purified from all that was

earthly in it, still busy at his heart. She heard his tidings silently, and one large tear stole down her pale cheek and dropped furtively upon her work, but she offered no opposition to her son's conduct ; and the Curate, who had that fine sense of observation which arises from Catholic sympathy with all that is best in the human heart, soon discerned that she was proud of the manly resolution her boy had taken. All women have a strong spice of romance in them, and a natural admiration for courage and adventure ; they have never quite taken the commercial view of soldiering, and Mrs. Brown secretly thought it was a right and appropriate ending to a disappointed love affair. She would willingly have killed the blacksmith ; she had a spiteful vindictive feeling against Sarah Jinks, who might, she believed, have managed her affairs more cleverly and kept them out of sight ; but as the thing was done and over, she could not bear to see her son go about so dejected and woebegone. She would be glad to know he wore a red coat and was winning hearts elsewhere. She would feel a fierce joy in being able to say to the blacksmith, when next he sent over for her son to help him shoe a light-heeled

horse, that he was gone for a soldier, and if the blacksmith wanted him now he must ask the Queen herself for him ; that he should have thought of this before ; and also pouring upon the clumsy shamefaced fellow, whose rough kindly nature she knew she could wound so easily, a phial full of the very vitriol of that condensed feminine wrath which burns into the flesh without noise or explosion.

When Tom Brown, her husband, was informed of what had happened, he did not like it at all. The hay had to be stacked, the potatoes to be dug, the fruit in the garden to be gathered and stored. William was his right-hand man, and he did not see at first how to get on in the absence of the strong willing arms which had never seemed to weary in their work till lately. It is strange, but nevertheless it is quite true to add also that he, Tom Brown, the father of this seven-months' child, could not get rid of the fancy that he was a discharged servant, and he was privately apprehensive that he must have done something wrong or disrespectful towards his son, or the boy would not have gone away from him.

The flaxen-headed cherry-cheeked lads and

lasses who made up the rest of the Brown family likewise received the intelligence of this event after their own fashion, and set up a prolonged howl as soon as the information reached them ; but dried their eyes and hushed their wailings when a general distribution of gooseberry jam was made to comfort them by their mother. Jack, however, a sturdy heavy breeched boy of twelve, sidled surlily up to his mother and plucked her by the apron stealthily. She stooped down to hear his childish secret, and the boy blubbered in a whisper half choked by emotion, ‘Oi wunts fur tubbee a sojer tew wi ower Willie.’

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE TEN POUND NOTE.

NEXT morning Mrs. Brown was very busy upstairs putting her son's things in order, and getting them ready to send after him to the dépôt of his regiment, whither the Curate had promised to convey them as soon as they were packed. There was a good deal to do for him, boys wear out their clothes so fast, and the thrifty woman put aside everything that wanted mending, and everything that he might have outgrown, only choosing the finest and best of his shirts and stockings, that he might not be disgraced among his comrades, but make as creditable a figure as the rest of them. When did it ever happen that our womenkind were not more thoughtful for us than we are for ourselves? Having done all that was to be done, and packed her boy's box with a neatness to which only female hands can attain, the

mother unlocked her own private drawer and took out the ten pound note which had been pressed into her hands by the stranger huntsman in return for the rose she had given him, as he was about to leave her for ever. The dried leaves of the poor dead flower, which had been wrapped in it so long, had left a stain upon it, and obliterated some of the marks on it, and it was but a soiled and crumpled piece of paper; but she knew its value now. She considered that this money belonged in a peculiar way to her son William, and as he was now going out in the world she was determined that a part of it should be spent in the purchase of such necessaries as he wanted, and that she would send the remainder to him with a loving message by their steadfast friend the Curate.

Mrs. Brown, however, did not well know how to account to her husband or her neighbours for the possession of this ten pound note. She could not get it changed at Wakefield, and if she attempted to change it at Dronington she would never hear the last of it. So she spread the ten pound note before her, and an unuttered prayer was probably in her

mind as she sat down to think the matter out. She looked very serious, as we all do when alone, while she patiently revolved the subject in her mind for an hour or more. Ten pounds appeared to her so large a sum that she was afraid to send it intact lest it should lead her son into temptation, or perhaps get him into trouble. What explanation could she give to him as to the manner in which she had obtained so much money? She did not like to tell the truth, for reasons obvious enough. Her husband had never got over his feeling of aversion to that stranger who had come and gone in a few hours, and she was uneasy at the thought of mentioning his name to her son. There was only one way out of this embarrassment, and that was to go to London, where, if all she had been told of the great city were true, she might change the ten pound note unobserved, and buy the few things she wanted much cheaper and better than at Dronington. She had been very much excited by her son's departure; it was the only noteworthy event which had happened in her life since her marriage, and the mere idea of rapid motion and change of scene was a relief to her. She had been

told that she might go to London in two hours and return in the same time, that would be four. It would take her an hour to walk to the nearest station, and an hour to walk back. She would want an hour in London to change her bank-note and make her purchases. That would be just seven hours in all, and she counted them anxiously on her fingers. Well, that would be from nine o'clock in the morning till four in the afternoon, and her husband was going to market with farmer Higginbottom to sell his calf on Friday, which was market day at Dronington. To-morrow was Friday, and to-morrow she could go to London unperceived while he was away, and be back before he returned; for farmer Higginbottom was a thirsty and convivial soul, who never stirred from the Nag's Head tap-room after business was over, till he had only just time to save the daylight and drive home before it was quite dark. Mrs. Brown therefore calculated she could do all she had to do with several hours to spare, and she began to prepare for her journey by putting such things as would be needed during her absence within easy reach of her eldest daughter, a solemn blue-eyed

matronly little body of fourteen years old, who was quite capable of giving her brothers and sisters a dinner of cold meat and hot potatoes without help from anybody.

Then she showed a very feminine quality. Having made up her mind to deceive her husband and family respecting her movements on the following day, she was unusually kind to them all, as if she were under the necessity of making them some amends for what she was about to do; though they would never know of it and therefore could have no cause to grieve. She was unusually frank and open that afternoon, and had none of those harmless little family government secrets with her daughter about nothing, which make up the household life of women. On the contrary, she volunteered to say that she should go over to the old Manor House and drink tea with the housekeeper left in charge of it, because the housekeeper had become lame and could not get about, and because the housekeeper had some good laying hens, which perhaps she would exchange now she could not look after them for something more useful to her; and because she herself would like a

little change and a gossip with her neighbour this fine weather, and wanted the housekeeper, who was a Devonshire woman, to tell her how to clot cream, which she had heard was a good thing with stewed plums and sugar for the chest. Mrs. Brown had no end of reasons for doing that which she did not intend to do at all, and told them with a quaint and hearty good humour which looked like a demure revolt against her domestic duties, and a prim appeal for liberty. Her eldest daughter rallied her slyly on her new-born fancy for gadding ; and Tom Brown smiled, well pleased, behind his pipe, to see her bear the loss of her favourite son so bravely. She made such a soft serene air around her in the inn kitchen that summer afternoon that the place and its inmates were transfigured by it ; and years afterwards they all remembered it as one of those supremely happy days which stand out of our lives, and seem lit up by some stray rays of a light which shines from Heaven.

## CHAPTER X.

## TAKEN INTO CUSTODY.

So Mrs. Brown went to London and arrived in due course at the Paddington Station, having contrived to escape observation and inquiry so far. She was dressed in a clean cotton gown of a pretty pattern in fast colours which washed well, and had on, moreover, a long cloak and a neatly plaited cap, white as snow, and a coal-scuttle bonnet. She carried a large gingham umbrella in one hand, and a white market-basket with wide flaps in the other, ready for her purchases. She looked a homely decent body, and soon found herself in the Edgware Road, quite dazed by the roar and bustle of the traffic, which poured through it with a ceaseless and deafening sound. She did not think London a very large place, for she fancied that it comprised nothing but the Edgware Road and the streets adjacent. She noticed

that it terminated in an archway, and what appeared to be a common at one end of this Edgware Road, and a mean open space at the other ; for Bayswater, Kilburn, and the neighbouring suburbs were then unbuilt. She was, however, amazed and delighted at the beauty, variety, and splendour of the shops. If she had had any money of her own, she would have ventured on one of those surprisingly cheap and lovely dresses she saw for her eldest daughter, or at least upon a ribbon. In any case she would remember some of the patterns which she admired, and both she and her daughter were handy with their needles. She stood looking intently at one shop window where a ready-made gown was exposed upon a wire model, which set it off to tantalising advantage, when one of the gallant shopmen, scenting a customer, came out and entered into conversation with her.

‘Walk hin, mum,’ said this Edgware Road Knight of the Yard-stick, who was a pushing young man, anxious for business. ‘We’re sellink horf at an alarmin sacrifice. Ladies dresses in that style, mum, larst Pariss Fashings, nine and nine, mum, we’ll say nine shillinks to

you, mum,' urged the pushing young shopkeeper, who spoke through his nose.

‘Oi baint a come fur tew buy a gownd, zur. I do want zum wooll’n zocks for my son, zur, nought but that,’ answered Mrs. Brown, blushing modestly, for the pushing young man was becoming a little too demonstrative in his attentions.

‘Socks, mum. Step hin, mum. Stout men’s one and nine, is that your figgur, mum? Best stock of woollink goods hin the trade, mum. Walk hin, mum.’

And Mrs. Brown walked in.

She was a very fair judge of the things she had come there to purchase, and soon perceived that, although the pushing young man might have the best stock of woollen goods in the trade, he was very wary of showing them, for those offered for her inspection were slop-made things, half cotton, which would come all to pieces the first time they were washed. She did not know how to get away without buying something, or she would have left the shop as soon as she saw she could not find what she wanted there. But the shopkeeper and his assistants, and his young ladies with their assist-

ants hemmed her in, and she could not escape from them. At last, hot, badgered, worried, and half ashamed of herself, yet having a woman's rooted aversion to part with her money without its worth, she asked for a ball of cotton and a paper of needles to mend her boy's things, thinking discreetly that she could not be cheated of very much in that bargain. One of the young ladies, and her immediate assistant, put up the needles and cotton in pink paper, and with a manner so august and condescending that Mrs. Brown (as many a duchess has been before her) felt positively flattered by it. Then she took out her ten pound note and offered it in payment for just sixpence half-penny.

‘Cash !’ sneered the young lady.

‘Kash !’ echoed her assistant.

‘Cash,’ said the cashier lower down. ‘Six and half, ten pounds,’ said the young ladies’ assistant, going to the cashier’s desk with the bank-note.

The cashier turned the bank-note about, looked through it, held it upside down, felt it between his finger and thumb, and finally tasted it.

Now the race of cashiers are pretty conversant with the fact that in nine cases out of ten bank-notes are paid into the Bank of England within something like three months of their issue ; and this note of Mrs. Brown's was eighteen years old ! Besides, from having been kept in a damp place, or from having been dropped or rubbed against something during its long sojourn at the 'Chequers' inn, it had acquired a brownish black stain, which stain had fallen precisely on the number of the note, smudging two of the figures, and rendering them illegible. So the cashier having tasted the note once, tasted it again, as if all the wisdom of his craft had settled on his tongue.

The pushing young man observing these proceedings, walked down the shop, eyed the cashier through the bars of his pulpit-desk, and whispered, 'Is it a plant, Mr. Codger ? Note a flash 'un ?'

'Well, I'm not haxactly sure it's a flash 'un,' said Mr. Codger, holding the note up to the light again ; 'only, yer see, it's pretty nigh hateen years after date, an' that's a goodish time for a note to be out of the bank. Who tendered it ?'

‘Suspicious female, got up like a spectabul farmer’s wife,’ answered the pushing young man, following the note in the experimental tests to which the wary Mr. Codger kept on subjecting it. ‘Thought there was somethink queer about her when she fust came hin. What’s to be done?’

Mr. Codger stood up on the lowest bar of his high stool, and glanced down the shop to where Mrs. Brown’s long cloak and coal-scuttle bonnet were absorbing the contemplations of the two young counter ladies attired in silk gowns, and engaged with reels of sarsnet. ‘Stop here,’ he said to the pushing young man, and going up to the suspicious customer, he said, looking at her fixedly, ‘This is a very old note, mum.’

‘Be it zur,’ replied Mrs. Brown, who, ignoring what constituted old age in a bank-note, was puzzled by the observation, and reddened.

‘Would you ‘ave any objeckshuns to give me your name and address, mum, and to write ‘em at the back of this note?’ proceeded Mr. Codger, who whipped a very sharp steel pen from behind his ear, and spoke in an accent that began to freeze.

Mrs. Brown coloured a deeper red, and as the blushes of countrywomen are strong of dye, her flesh resembled a brick fresh from the kiln. 'Oi can't rite, zur,' said she, fidgeting uncomfortably; and then, growing suspicious in her turn, she added, 'Wheerfour tew should oi rite? Giv' me my money plees zur, for I wants fur to go whoam.'

Mr. Codger, mistaking a gesture she made with her hand for an attempt to clutch at the note, drew it rapidly out of her reach, and, with an imperceptible nod towards the door, which conveyed to a porter on duty there that he was not to let this customer with the coal-scuttle bonnet go out, he flustered back to his desk, and gabbled to the pushing young man, 'Spect it's a plant. She looks a rum 'un. If the note ain't bad, it's most likely been stole, and they've made hefforts to play tricks with the number, and ain't succeeded. Take it to Mr. Slopgood,' saying which he handed the note to the pushing young man, who betook himself with it direct to one best known to him as 'the Governor,' who was reading a newspaper in a parlour sanctified by the word PRIVATE painted in black on the ground-glass door.

Mr. Slopgood was the senior partner in the firm Slopgood and Flimsay, who had the honour of trimming half the caps in the Edgware Road with ribbons of an inferior quality. Knowing much about sham wares, thanks to the enterprising sale of which during a quarter of a century he was justified to boast of being a self-made man, Mr. Slopgood was naturally a fair judge of a bad note. He tasted this one as Mr. Codger had done, smelt it, and held it a foot from his nose, the better to scrutinise it through a pair of double eye-glasses, rimmed with tortoiseshell. Then with an emphatic nod, and deliberate expression, like that of a judge under a wig, he pronounced the note to be either a forged or a stolen one, 'pon his honour,' —which, by the by, was a small stake enough.

The upshot of this was that Mrs. Brown was requested to step into the parlour and receive her change, and after a minute's prefatory catechising by Mr. Slopgood, was confronted with a policeman who had been beckoned and ushered in through the private entrance. This guardian of the peace entered with his shiny-roofed hat in his hand—the present tasteful helmet having not yet been invented—and he

apostrophised Mrs. Brown roundly with, 'Now then, old lady, what's all this all about ?'

He would not have said 'old lady,' had Mrs. Brown's bonnet and cloak been of Edgware Road instead of country make ; nor would he have looked at her over his glazed stock as if he already took her guilt for granted. But when this strangely rustic customer backed into a corner of the parlour, glaring at Mr. Slopgood the pushing young man and the policeman with eyes distended to twice their size, there was a movement of retreat on the part of Mr. Slopgood and the pushing young man, who felt as if there were mischief brewing.

'Giv' me my money,' faltered Madge, who understood nothing of the suspicions she had aroused, and fancied she had fallen into a trap set to rob her ; 'oi wants fur to go whoam—you zur, with the pooter buttons, tell 'em to giv' me my change that oi be waiting for.' This was to the policeman ; for the County Constabularies not being organised then as they are now, Madge had never seen a policeman in uniform, and the pewter buttons only conveyed to her something of a military notion, and consequently of protection.

‘Come, don’t be obstropolous,’ said the policeman, conciliatingly: ‘We none of us want to do you ‘arm. All as you’ve got to do is to tell us ‘ow you became possessed of this ‘ere note which this gemm’un, Mr. Slopgood, ‘as reason to believe is stolen property. If you be a *honest* ‘ooman, you can tell us who guv’ it surelie, and you’ll give us your own name and haddress too, which there ain’t no reason to be afeerd on if no crimes ‘as been committed.’

‘I’m a *honest* woman,’ hoarsely replied Madge, whose heart heaved and whose nostrils dilated. She called for her money again, angrily, passionately, and barred the door through which the policeman had come with her body, her basket, and her umbrella, as if for fear he should go out without seeing justice done her. But, perceiving that the policeman had taken the note from Mr. Slopgood and was examining it, she made a sudden dart to snatch it from him.

‘Yah! would yer now!’ cried that official, bringing his gloved fist down on her hand with a hard thud. ‘Come, come, none o’ that.’

‘Keep the pease, pleeceman, keep the pease,’ chorussed Mr. Slopgood and the pushing young man, who were both half outside the door

marked 'Private' by this time, and some other pushing young men and some pushing young ladies, attracted by the noise, scampered up, and made a curious background of pushing faces behind Mr. Slopgood.

The policeman, appealed to by a respectable tradesman to keep the peace, and feeling angered on his own account at the grab made almost successfully at the bank-note, took out from his blue pockets a pair of handcuffs, and clumsily endeavoured to seize Madge by the wrists. She wrenched the instruments away from him in an instant, and put her back against the wall, quivering in every limb with rage and shame. This was the first time in her whole life that any man had laid an assaulting hand on her, and she stood at bay like a wild cat, too agitated and pale to scream, or do aught but foam at the lips and glare. And now followed a sorry scene. Policeman X. 1000 was an honest fellow, but a dogged. Stung at the resistance offered by this woman, and feeling moreover that the public eye was upon him in the persons of Messrs. Slopgood and Co., he strode determinedly towards Madge, caught one of her arms as in a vice, and whisked her right round

in such a way as almost to wrench her shoulder out of its socket. But he had no feeble woman from Tyburn slums to deal with. Quick and strong as country blood, Madge turned with her uplifted fist and struck her persecutor full on the face with the handcuffs. The blow brought a great spurt of blood from the man's unprepared nostrils, and, blinded by the blow, he gasped 'Help!' and tottered back, fumbling savagely in his pocket for his truncheon. But this movement was his ruin: the handcuffs fell once, twice, thrice, again on his open face, crashing heavily, like hammers on a flattened nail, so that the policeman reeled, clung at the table to save himself, but dragged it down with him in his fall; for it was a slight table, and bore a decanter and tumbler of water, an ink-stand, a plate of biscuits, the newspaper, a brass bound ledger, and a yellow poster, emblazoned—

SLOPGOOD, FLIMSAY AND CO.

SELLING OFF AT AN ALARMING SACRIFICE!

All these things served as a bed to Policeman X., and were soon copiously intermingled with his gore. And now it was remarkable to see the general stampede executed by Mr. Slopgood

and the pushing young men, and the pushing young ladies; the latter uttering distracted squeals. The alarming sacrifice of Mr. Slopgood's wares was as nothing compared to the alarm of the pushing young men as they raced down the shop, bawling to one another to stop 'that devil of a woman.' The only person who made a moment's stand was the porter at the door, but descrying a headlong woman bearing down in his direction with a brandished umbrella, and something which his disturbed mind took for pistols, he thought better of it, and vanished into the road-way, where he set to yelling 'Perlice!' as loud as his lungs would permit. In another moment Madge was by his side in the street, clamouring in frenzied accents that she had been robbed and ill-used. Half the houses in the neighbourhood immediately emptied their tenants on to the pavement, sashes were thrown up and heads craned forth, ubiquitous boys rushed up hooting, a few cabs and an omnibus reined in and blocked up the circulation, and Madge continued to fill the air with her wailings. But not for long. The porter, emboldened by the presence of numbers, made a valiant move to secure Madge, and roared,

‘There’s a bin murder !’ Madge did nothing to escape him. She stopped short in her cries, staggered, and dropped senseless in front of a hansom cab. She had burst a blood-vessel.

An hour later Madge was lying in the accidents ward of the nearest hospital, and a policeman, seated in a Windsor chair, mounted guard at the door of that ward. Meantime the bank-note business having been succinctly explained to an Inspector by Mr. Slopgood—who further was most magnificent in directing that Policeman X. 1000’s bruised countenance should be embrocated on the premises regardless of expense—a constable was despatched to the Bank of England to consult the list of notes stopped in the course of the last eighteen years. The entertaining volume which forms this list being produced, it soon appeared that, eighteen years before, a 10*l.* note, No.  $\frac{A}{Z}$  00012345 had been stopped, along with some others, at the request of one Jiddledubbin, a maker of wind instruments. Now as Madge’s note was numbered  $\frac{A}{Z}$  000123 and bore two additional figures, which had been obliterated, it became clear to

the intellect of the meanest policeman that the figures obliterated must be 45, and that Madge had consequently stolen this note eighteen years ago, or feloniously received it, well knowing it to be stolen. So the charge was duly entered on the station sheet as 'being possessed of a stolen bank-note, without being able to give a satisfactory account of the same, and having, of malice prepense, beaten and assaulted Police Constable X. 1000, with intent to do him grievous bodily harm, the aforementioned beating being administered to the great grief, hurt, and scandal of the said Police Constable X. 1000, her Majesty's well-beloved liege.' It is a comfort to add that this item was entered in a fine, bold hand, and that the Inspector having wiped his pen on the cuff of his coat, despatched a fresh constable to look up Jiddle-dubbin—who made the wind instruments—to the end that this Jiddledubbin, being triumphantly restored to the possession of his property, might learn that the police of his country neither slumber nor sleep, and bless the land where he was born.



BOOK III.



## CHAPTER I.

## A FASHIONABLE WEDDING.

So Madge lay in the ward of a hospital, and on the charge sheet of a police-station. But whilst doctors and nurses are restoring her to consciousness in order that she may be in a fit state of body to face the accusation of having robbed Mr. Jiddledubbin, let us revert to the nobleman who was the primary cause of all this—the stranger who made his brief appearance at the ‘Chequers’ inn that rainy night eighteen years ago, and vanished like a shooting, star.

On the same day and at the same hour—such things will happen—that Madge was married to Thomas Brown, ostler, in the parish church of Wakefield-in-the-Marsh, a very different sort of marriage ceremony was performed in London. His Grace the Duke of Courthope and Revel was united, or in the more respectful

newspaper language of the day, his Grace led to the hymeneal altar the Lady Helena Pomona Cardwell, daughter and sole heiress of the celebrated and Right Honourable Sir Job Boroughs Whitworth Placard Cardwell, Marquis of Newcomen and Knight of St. Patrick. His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury politely absolved the noble Duke from the necessity of repairing with his illustrious consort to a cold, damp church upon a winter's morning, and granted a special license under his high dispensing signature as Lord Primate of the realm. By virtue of this courtly and graceful document the Right Reverend Dr. Simonet Tythe, Bishop of Selsley-and-Man, who was descended from a family of French Huguenots, and the very Venerable Archdeacon Crorl, who was descended from himself, were enabled to administer the sacrament of matrimony after the most approved rules of politeness ; and in a warm and comfortable manner at the Duke's mansion in town. It was an imposing building erected by Sir John Vanbrugh, and it stretched from one of the busiest parts of the Thames river and blocked up the way to one of the busiest parts of parliamentary London at Whitehall, and it was

properly aired and heated for the marriage sacrament, which a church would hardly have been. There could be no doubt that a sacrament was administered in this agreeable way, for although the Protestant clergy have a trick of sneering at the sacred pretensions of marriage, which they probably derived from Martin Luther, yet the Roman Catholic Church very formally and precisely includes matrimony among its seven sacraments. Indeed, considering that the word sacrament is derived from the Latin *Sacramentum*, and we are still accustomed to speak sometimes of 'the marriage *oath*' as a sacred thing, some persons are rather inclined to think that the Protestant church has dealt lightly in this matter. Moreover, there was no getting out of the fact that the Duke of Courthope's marriage was a sacrament, for although his Grace naturally inherited a belief in the orthodoxy of the established Church of England, yet the most noble Marquis of Newcomen had hereditary and political reasons equally strong for adhering to the Church of Rome, and the Lady Helena Pomona therefore naturally declared herself a Papist. It was upon that account his Eminence Clement Sylvester Cardinal

Archbishop of Rouen, a friend and ally of the family, and Monsignor Digby, an English Jesuit, had looked rather coolly on this marriage at first, and had proposed to convert the Duke as an indispensable preliminary to it. But they had subsequently become reconciled to the inevitable, when Lord Newcomen, who, like most successful politicians, loved a compromise, assured them that married ladies generally have their own way, and that the Duke would probably be soon converted in the curtained and eloquent privacy of his wife's apartments. Ultimately, therefore, it came about that his Eminence the Cardinal consented to shew that he could be to the full as well bred, where a Duke was concerned, as his Grace the Lord Primate of England. Something was courteously whispered about the extremely delicate health of the Lady Helena, who could attend three balls and dance eight hours every night of the season without inconvenience ; and the muster of ecclesiastical dignitaries of both persuasions in their robes of honour at Revel House that day was extremely edifying.

The Archbishop of Rouen came over from France to attend the ceremony, and he and his

Catholic clergy appeared to the most advantage, for a mere prim apron and silk stockings, however artistically made to display the rounded calf of a well-turned leg, or the plump majesty of a prelate's proportions below the chest, look neither so dignified or picturesque as the flowing robes, the priceless lace, the handsome cross and signet ring which gave pomp and splendour to the commanding presence of Archbishop Clement, the most famous orator and theologian of the Gallican Church.

There was almost regal state at Revel House that day, when the political and social interests of the two great names of Courthope and Newcomen, whose partizans divided the kingdom, were blended into one. There was not a gentleman of either family who did not feel that his chances of winning fame and distinction in the public service were strengthened by that alliance. The carriages which bore the wedding guests to breakfast, stretched in an unbroken line from Whitehall to Piccadilly ; and there was not a single person in any one of them, from the veteran party leader to the bridesmaids' sisters in the fourth or fifth year of their teens, and the dashing, high-spirited young cornets and clerks

—who had not something to hope or to fear from the Duke or the Marquis.

Lord Newcomen had been in the Ministry from time immemorial. He was a very clever nobleman, stout, good natured, of an easy temper. The Court liked him because he really would do anything he could to please a prince or princess, and liked to please them better than he liked to please other people. His colleagues approved him because he was not noisy or troublesome. He let them take as much fame and consume as much consequence as they pleased, so that they left him the substantial benefits of office—a crown lease now and then, a lord wardenship for himself, an unobtrusive sinecure for a friend or a relative. In return he gave good dinners for the party, kept open the pleasantest house in town, and was always ready to put the peers in a good humour by a few amusing after-dinner stories. His Lordship was indeed an invaluable man to his party, for he had no political opinions, and had never professed any. He was pledged to no course of action upon any subject; and he was popular among the people because he was the most affable and unaffected of men; a stout hearty-

looking gentleman with full red cheeks, blue eyes, and short sand-coloured whiskers. Personal appearance has a great deal to do with popularity, and nobody could say that the Marquis was a fop or a sloven. He looked like a thriving cheesemonger, and his grandfather had actually been in that profitable branch of trade, till at the close of one of the longest law-suits on record even for an Irish inheritance, it had suddenly appeared that none of the claimants who had been contending for the property had anything to do with it, and that the rightful heir was Lord Newcomen's grandfather, old Jim McMurrough or Borough, who kept a shop in Sligo. Jim drank himself to death with joy ; but, of course, his successor changed the family name in accordance with its ancient spelling and significance, as sanctioned by Sir Bernard Burke, and bloomed out as a full fledged ambassador. His son, the present Marquis, had been dandled into statesmanship on the knees of duchesses and princesses of the blood. He had ridden cock-horse on the walking-sticks of kings and emperors. His father had turned opportunity to good account ; he had increased the family property, paid off mortgages with the proceeds

of early information, and purchased so much parliamentary influence in unsuspected places, that he could pull an incredible number of political check-strings without apparently moving foot or finger. The present Marquis had stepped into this agreeable position at about five-and-twenty years old. He had married a charming French wife, and notwithstanding his bluff British aspect, he really looked upon the affairs of this world very much from a Parisian point of view. He laughed at men and columns, while he used and enjoyed them.

No wonder then that all the world of wealth and fashion were ready to come at his call, and that their promptitude was in no way diminished by the opportunity which arose on the present occasion of paying court to the rich, powerful placeman and an authentic duke at the same time. His Grace, had he been consulted, would have liked to manage the thing more quietly, but the French Marchioness would not hear of it being done in a corner, and Lord Newcomen thought if it was done at all, it should be done well. His wife had made the match, being fascinated by the Duke's title, which was historical and familiar to her in many charming

French novels. Lord Newcomen thought that as his daughter must be married to somebody, she might as well be Duchess of Courthope and Revel as not. He was rather staggered at the business arrangements suggested by Messrs. Mortmain and Feoff to his solicitors, Messrs. Plumbas and Dumbus; for the Duke required the whole amount of his wife's fortune to be paid down, whereas his Lordship was determined to tie up every penny under stringent settlements; but at last the thing was arranged by Lord Newcomen negotiating a loan through the Government broker with a Life Insurance Company which wanted a new charter, and was prepared to lend the Duke of Courthope a sum sufficient for his immediate necessities on the tacit understanding that they should get it.

Things having thus been settled to the satisfaction of everybody in good society, the wedding festival, as already said, was imposing in its state and magnificence. The company comprised the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Cabinet Ministers and ex-Ministers of both the great parties in the country, the Duke being nominally a Tory and the Marquis nominally a

Whig ; most of the proud old Catholic nobility who so seldom come abroad, all the well-connected bishops, deans, and canons of the High Church and the Broad Church, all the fine ladies and gentlemen who could beg, borrow, or win an invitation to be present. The Catholic portion of the marriage service was sung by some of the finest voices in Europe, imported from divers opera houses as the custom is. The gorgeous family plate and art treasures, collected by wealth and taste for countless generations, were profusely displayed, and as the great folding-doors of the banqueting hall were flung open by the Duke's Chamberlain to his friends, the band of his Grace's old regiment, the Grenadier Guards, played them in amidst the blaze of diamonds, and the nodding of plumes on all the beauty and chivalry of the land.

Lord and Lady Newcomen received the wedding guests with the accomplished charm of a practised host and hostess ; for the Duke and Duchess, in compliance with our English custom, left town immediately after breakfast for Beau-manoir, his Grace's place, in one of the Midland Counties, which Pope had called a wonder of the world.

There more rejoicings awaited them. Triumphal arches were erected with  
'Our Young Duke, and Our Old Constitution,'  
'Welcome HOME,'  
'O. & H.,'

and other romantic and original devices inscribed upon them in flowers or coloured lamps. His Grace arrived in a carriage and four; his illustrious consort sat beside him, tall and upright as a wand, and the people loudly cheered them as they swept on to the stately castle gates of Beaumanoir, attended by a guard of honour composed of the County Yeomen. The park-keepers in their state liveries came forward to receive them, the ancient Norman church rung out a joyous peal from its time-honoured belfry, the militia band sprung into music on the lawn, and a salute was fired in the park. As they neared the castle gates, the Duke stood up and bowed repeatedly to the crowd. He was the same tall, gallant-looking gentleman who had slept at the 'Chequers' inn, and he was visible in the sight of hundreds as the perfect type and presentment of a great hereditary noble—the physical perfection of blood and race. Just

then there was heard far above the bells and music, and above the roar of cannon, a wild shriek from a human heart which had broken, and a young woman, travel-stained, pale and haggard, fought her way through the throng, and flung herself in mad despair under the horses' feet. She was one of the numerous women of whose honour his Grace had made sport, but has nothing to do with our story farther than to illustrate that the Duke's marriage had its small cloud among so much sunshine. She was dragged away, a shapeless mass all huddled together; nobody paid any attention to the incident; the crowd closed round her, angry at the interruption, and thinking she was an impudent beggar. The carriage rolled rapidly on, and the Duke welcomed his wife to his ancestral home amidst deafening huzzahs from his tenantry and dependants, as though he had done something great or good. But as the flag was hoisted on the battlements to announce his presence to the country round, and gave out its heavy folds to the wintry winds, it was remarked that his Grace looked a little unnerved, and that his hand trembled so that he could scarcely hold his hat in it. The newly-

made Duchess looked at him with astonishment, and whispered in a rather crisp way she had learned from her mother, '*Mon ami, vous feriez mieux de vous retirer.*' Then she turned graciously to acknowledge the congratulations of the kinsfolk and retainers of the great house who had assembled to do her honour, while the Duke found a pretext to go to his dressing-room and drink a deep draught of wine before he appeared again.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE DUCHESS OF COURTHOPE.

THE marriage which took place under such auspicious circumstances to all outward appearance was not a very happy match. The husband and wife did not quarrel. Persons in their rank of life have no need to do that, because they can so easily avoid each other's society ; and the Duke of Courthope lived much apart from the Duchess. Indeed, his Grace did not like the restraints of married life, and his wife constantly galled and vexed him. She was a bright, sarcastic French person, who took very decided views of things, and was obedient only to her confessor. She had rather a contempt for her husband when she came to know him. She thought him dull and heavy-witted compared with her father, and the brilliant diplomatists she had been accustomed to meet every evening round her mother's tea-table. She got into a

habit of sneering quietly at him, and the Duke winced under her covert taunts as if they were barbed arrows which struck him in the face and breast. Perhaps she had her own reasons for having a poor opinion of him ; who can pry into the secrets of married life ? His Grace had very little conversation. He was accustomed to be amused and made much of. He had been always king of every company he entered, the bright particular star of any firmament in which he deigned to shine, and he soon found out his wife despised him. First he was astonished, then angry ; but at last her contempt rendered him sullen and indifferent.

About a year after their marriage a son and heir was born to them, and it seemed at first as though the strong link of an existence for which they were both responsible, and which was a part of their own lives, would have drawn them together. The Duchess certainly tried for a while to put a better face on things. She went singing about her nursery with her child in her arms, and tried to jest with her husband ; but if there was one thing which his Grace could understand less than another it was a joke. He was like most English noblemen of the highest

rank—rather solemn, and had an excessive sense of his own importance. It irritated him to feel his moustaches pulled by merry fingers, and arms flung round his neck with screams of laughter, while a pair of dapper feet dangled half a yard from the ground, and clung to him. He liked to be made love to on hands and knees, and invited to his table only toadies who flattered him. Madge, if she had had ever so little education, just enough to speak and think in conventional English, would have fooled him to his heart's content. She would have made him supremely happy. He would have been faithful to her, because he would have found no such adulation elsewhere ; he would have been proud of her, because she would have been so proud of him. He and Madge had the same tastes and pleasures ; they both loved horses and dogs, coarse plain food, and a country life in the open air. Lady Helena had not a wish or an idea in common with him. She was light-headed and witty, he was pompous and dull, not so much by nature as by habits which had overgrown his instincts. She liked the life of drawing rooms, books, poetry, music, the arts, and the perpetual whirl of society ; he hated all

these things. So at last they gave up all attempt to understand each other; and one day the Duke, stung beyond endurance by her taunts, let fall a threat of fearful import, telling her rudely and plainly that she was not his wife, and he stood up in his wrath and cursed her.

‘I knew it,’ she answered, with keen contempt, ‘and am only too glad that my boy is all my own. *Tenez, M. le Duc, si vous êtes duc—chose qui n'est pas trop sûre d'après ce que dit mon père. Vous êtes un lâche!*’ and she swept from the room, leaving his Grace livid with passion, and terrified by his own imprudence.

‘Damn the wine !’ he muttered fiercely, after she was gone; ‘if I had not drunk so much at the hunt dinner I should not have lost my temper. But never mind, my lady will forget it before morning, and at all events that old humbug, her father (who has done me so neatly), is too sensible to make a row.’

His Grace was partly right in this view of the case, and partly wrong. The Duchess did not forget it all before morning. On the contrary, she passed a greater part of the night closeted with her confessor, a wise old man, who

had known the wayward girl from her birth, and the next day, while his Grace was out shooting, she quietly returned with the priest to her own home, taking her infant son and his nurse with her. On the other hand, Lord Newcomen pooh-poohed the whole thing very pleasantly, and walked with the latest news on his lips into his wife's boudoir, giving her jocular orders to bring her Grace to her senses, and his wife, who loved and trusted and admired him, did as she was bid. Then he walked down to White's, where a telegram had assured him he should meet the Duke of Courthope, and they talked the matter over in the bow window, most agreeably.

Said the Duke : 'I give your Lordship my honour I am extremely distressed at having huffed her Grace—but, egad, I must tell your Lordship it was after dinner ;' and the Duke smiled demurely. He did not wish to put a grave face upon the business.

'By the piper that played before Moses, as they say in my native country, the little vixen has got her back up, and there's no getting it down, your Grace, for a day or two,' laughed the noble Marquis, who knew his daughter's

stubbornness upon a point of conscience where she was supported by the priesthood.

‘I leave myself entirely in your Lordship’s hands,’ resumed the Duke, with a courteous bow.

Lord Newcomen bit his lip, and his brow darkened almost imperceptibly for a moment. ‘Is there any proof against you, if you don’t let the cat out of the bag to anyone else?’ he asked suddenly. His Lordship knew the value of a direct home question when least expected.

The Duke of Courthope flushed crimson, his lips moved once or twice with a painful spasm, but no sound came from them. He could not force himself to tell a direct lie, and at last overcoming his emotion by a strong effort, he blurted out, ‘By God, my Lord, I don’t know,’ and then he bit his nether lip till the blood flowed.

Lord Newcomen looked very hard and keen when he heard this startling answer; and then said briefly, ‘Let me know the facts; perhaps I can tell you. What’s the woman’s name?’

‘Zephirine Malvoisin.’

The Marquis nodded.

‘The opera dancer?’

‘No ; her niece,’ answered the Duke, not sorry to relieve himself of his terrible secret to a man so clear-headed and expert in business as the Marquis.

‘Where is the girl now?’

‘She died in the county hospital shortly after my marriage.’

‘Marriage !’ echoed Lord Newcomen, with a slight tone of scorn, and raising his eyebrows ; then remembering how much any manifestation of feeling impedes business, and renders a mutual understanding between gentlemen difficult or impossible, he asked, with perfect politeness and good temper, ‘Any children, Duke?’

‘Two, a boy and a girl,’ answered his Grace, determined to make a clean breast of it.

‘Where are they ?’

‘For the life and soul of me I cannot tell,’ and the Duke, in mere nervous irritability and to give emphasis to his denial, rang the bell sharply, and asked the waiter for change for a sovereign.

Lord Newcomen looked out of the window and nodded to an acquaintance on the other side of the way till it was brought. He owed

half his success in life to the fact that he never lost an opportunity of being civil.

‘Do the woman’s relatives know anything about it?’ he asked, waiting patiently till the Duke had put up his change.

‘Her brother does. He was present, but he put himself out of court by forging my name to a bill of exchange.’

‘Have you got the paper?’

‘Oh, yes,’ said the Duke with a wry smile, which only moved one side of his mouth.

‘Where is the man?’

‘He lives at Rouen, and wrote me a bullying letter yesterday. I received it just as the hounds were about to throw off in my park.’

‘Let me see those papers,’ said Lord Newcomen quickly. ‘I mean the forgery and the begging letter.’

‘They are here,’ answered the Duke, recovering his pomposity. ‘I was about to place them in the hands of Mortmain, my solicitor, to protect me against that kind of impertinence.’

Lord Newcomen looked at him out of the extreme corner of one eye, and he thought ‘Dolt,’ but he said, ‘No, no, Duke, leave this business to me. Lord Protocol, in Paris, owes

something to me for having got him out of a scrape with an under-secretary at F. O. last year. I think we shall be able to give Monsieur Gontran de Malvoisin his choice between a vice-consulate in South America, on condition that he never returns, or the hulks at Toulon. It is quite immaterial to us which of the two he accepts : we must get rid of him.'

The Duke brightened into extreme grandeur and dignity at this unexpected relief. He had great confidence in Lord Newcomen, and a well-founded faith in the occult powers of government when set in motion by competent hands. 'Upon my soul I am monstrously obliged to your Lordship,' said his Grace, extending his hand with great cordiality, but somehow or other the noble Marquis did not see it, and the Duke was obliged to withdraw his outstretched fingers untouched.

Lord Newcomen had sent for the Clergy List, and was now turning over its pages, with a very stern expression come back into his face. If he had chosen to say what it meant he might have told that he intended to drive the nail he had in hand well home, indifferent as to any fine feelings it might pierce on its way, or any

sensitive nerves which might try to evade its point. With this purpose he was framing a few more questions. He never left business half done.

‘Where did the marriage take place, Duke?’

‘At Enghein,’ answered his Grace, wincing.

‘Enghein!’ mused Lord Newcomen. ‘Pooh! there’s no consul or British chaplain at Enghein.’

‘I did not say there was,’ replied the Duke, slyly.

‘Why then, hang it, Duke, you were not married at all,’ exclaimed the Marquis, throwing himself back and laughing heartily. ‘A Catholic marriage don’t count for anything except in Ireland—but stop, perhaps your private chaplain was one of the party?’

‘Yes,’ said the Duke.

‘Well, he didn’t register, of course?’

‘No,’ said the Duke.

‘He won’t peach, will he—I mean he is all right, you are on good terms with him? A chaplain is generally kept in order by his hopes or his fears.’

‘I am quite sure of him,’ said the Duke.

‘He is a gentleman; I have a tight grip on him.’

‘Name?’ asked the Marquis.

‘Dr. Porteous,’ answered the Duke, readily.

‘Well, Duke,’ observed Lord Newcomen, as he brought the interview to a close, ‘we may, I think, count on old Porteous. In the first place he is a gentleman and a man of honour, with a great admiration for his betters; he knows that whatever he might say no one would believe his word against yours, and that you would certainly contradict him; in the next place it would cost at least a hundred thousand pounds and about fifty years to dispute the succession to a dukedom with my grandson; it is not likely we shall be troubled by a beggarly French scene-shifter and his brood. However, it may be as well to throttle him, and if ever you hear any more about the business come to me. Mortmain would only stir up trouble, while we as you know have plenty of ways of settling such things quietly among ourselves; and the foreign police are always civil if well handled through the right people.’

## CHAPTER III.

## MARQUIS OF KINSGEAR.

THE Duke of Courthope and Revel never did hear anything more of the business which had formed the topic of conversation between his Grace and Lord Newcomen. The noble Marquis, his discreet and business-like father-in-law, died in the ordinary course of events, leaving his title and entailed estates to be fought for between a shoemaker in Cork and a captain in the Indian army ; both of whom were ruined in pocket and character by the litigation, just as a merchant seaman returned from Australia with an attorney behind him, and established his claim to govern a part of the British dominions by hereditary right, all wants of aptitude and education notwithstanding. The charming French Marchioness, who had been the life of London society so long, died also. She caught

cold, dowagering about with visiting cards, in an east wind ; and a Yankee Bowery girl, whom the merchant seaman had met while on a spree ashore at New York, was the next Marchioness of Newcomen. She made a showy peeress of the realm ; and had very tall footmen, who called out her name loudly upon drawing-room days, so that all St. James's Street might know what a fine coach and coachman she had. A good natured Marchioness she was too, and would have given much more money than she did to public charities if the costs of the attorney who raised her to the peerage had not been so large ; her fortunes, had they anything to do with this history, might be worth following. As it is they would lead us too far afield.

The bright-eyed Duchess of Courthope, who had married so grandly and so unhappily, fell into a low fever while superintending the preparations for her mother's funeral, and, last of her family, she died also, leaving only one child, a son, of about twelve years old, who had been her sole hope and darling in this world. His name was, among many other names, Bertran-Cardwell Wyldwyl ; he was commonly

called Marquis of Kinsgear, and he was undoubtedly heir to the title and estates of Courthope and Revel, with the unentailed estates of Newcomen; though strange to say he was only mentioned in his mother's and grandfather's will as Bertran-Cardwell ('my beloved son or grandson'), his own family name of Wyldwyl and the titles which he wore by courtesy having been omitted evidently through the blunder of a conveyancer. 'It was not even worth while to set the blunder right,' said Mr. Mortmain, the confidential family solicitor of the Wyldwyls, to his chief clerk. 'There is and can be no dispute about the person meant. The late Duchess had only one son, and her father, the late Marquis, had no other grandchild whom he ever to my knowledge recognised.'

'It is a curious mistake for Mr. Pynsent to have made, though, sir; isn't it?' observed the clerk, who had private suspicions of his own respecting the affairs of Mr. Mortmain's clients. 'Yes, it is, Mr. Copeland,' answered his employer, fastening a steady glance on his subordinate, and both kept up the legal fiction of deceiving each other even in the recesses of

their office, where there was no manner of occasion for double-dealing. So in due time honest Mr. Copeland rose to be a member of the firm, and it signed 'Mortmain, Copeland and Feoff' upon the briefs which it submitted for the opinion of counsel.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE LAW OF ENTAIL.

FULL eighteen years after the Duke of Court-hope's marriage, his Grace was seated one morning in the library of his hereditary Castle of Beaumanoir, which had been a monarch's residence, and was part of the dowry of a king's daughter, who had brought royal blood into the blue veins of Revel. It was a noble apartment, where generations of bygone princes and statesmen had wrought and pondered. It seemed still with the big silent memories of history; about it were grave dark pictures and mute marble busts of captains, judges, and ministers who had illustrated the lofty house of Wyldwyl from generation to generation, being born into place and honours. It had served many purposes that grand old room with its fretted roof, sculptured and painted by cunning hands long cold; its deep embayed windows which

looked over tall woods with the antlered deer that dwelt there, and a broad expanse of silver lake where the sluggish tench and the hoary carp slept in dim hollows under tideless waves, while the stately cygnet sailed pompously over them. It was here that Henry II. made his first appeal to Sir Raoul Wyldwyl, of Courthope, against the arrogance of Becket, and that Richard III. brooded over his dark and thorny path to power. Here that the eighth Henry, moved by Thomas Lord Revel, resolved upon his lawless divorce, which changed the faith of England ; and that Charles I. determined on the arrest of the Five Members, influenced, as was supposed, by the secret advice of Archibald Wyldwyl, first Marquis of Kinsgear.

On the northern wall, behind a long row of folio volumes marked with the names of theologians and philosophers, a sliding door which led through secret passages opened into one of the most sylvan parts of the park. You pressed the back of Jeremy Taylor in the centre of his *Ductor Dubitantium*, and the well made panel moved noiselessly backwards in its groove. In the passages beyond, the Jacobite emissaries from St. Germain had laid concealed in the days

of William and Anne, while their cause was still worth a risk because it had still a chance. It was in a niche of a bow window which commanded the widest view of the country round, that the last hopes of the Young Pretender had been ruined after the defeat of Culloden, and Sir Robert Walpole had won over the most powerful of his remaining adherents to the House of Hanover. They were keen sighted men those nobles of the long prosperous line of Wyldwyl, and seldom found themselves on the losing side in politics, while politics were the business of gentlemen and patriots. But the present Duke finding them given over to the commercial classes, and become more or less a game of all fours between stock jobbers, speculators, contractors, and the permanent clerks of departments, had early learned to feel the same contempt for them which is entertained by most men of high rank and large fortune for the *pettifoggery* of modern administration. He considered truly that office was not worth the vexations and annoyances which inevitably accompanied it; and after having been for a few weeks a member of the club which formed Sir Robert Peel's first cabinet, he would never

consent to be mixed up with any other, nor was he asked for his advice by any future minister of the Crown. Latterly he had resided a large part of the year at Beaumanoir, because he was a much greater man there than in London ; and he might have lived on his estates in dignity and happiness had he not been seized with an incurable greed and thirst for land. His Grace's agents had orders to buy up every acre, perch, and rood that was for sale in the county ; and it was well known that he would give any price for it, rather than allow it to pass into other hands. The first news that an estate in his Grace's neighbourhood might be bought was as good as a fortune to any one. Sometimes land was bought and sold half-a-dozen times by his own agents or their coadjutors before it was ultimately conveyed to him, and the bills of surveyors, solicitors, and conveyancers employed in these purchases were prodigious.

The nominal rent-roll of the Duke of Court-hope, when he had succeeded to the title and estates of his family, amounted to about ninety thousand a year. Since then, however, it had enormously increased, and his Grace thought with some complacency that whereas, at his

accession to the dukedom, his possessions had barely exceeded ten thousand a year in land within his own county, he could now show by figures that his rents should not be less than seventy thousand a year there. To be sure the liabilities upon these large estates had necessarily accumulated. It had been deemed expedient to destroy the late Duke's will to avoid the payment of legacy duty, and his Grace had left behind him such directions as he had to leave by word of mouth. It had also been considered peculiarly fortunate for the family honour that a son and successor had been born to him just in the nick of time ; for had not the young heir made himself responsible for about eleven hundred thousand pounds of debt on coming of age, there were some rough-tongued creditors who talked of impeaching his late Grace for felony. However, all this was ancient history. The living Duke had always been able to obtain loans for his immediate needs. He had borrowed money at fifteen per cent. to buy land which yielded two per cent. of income ; and when he wanted more to uphold his rank and dignity, he had deferred the payment of the late Duke's bequests, which had been committed to his honour, till a

convenient season, and applied the family trusts which had devolved upon him to his own use. In most cases the *cestuis que trustent* had unhesitatingly confided their possessions to his keeping, in others he had not thought it worth while to ask their consent, because inquiry is never made about trust property, while the usual rates of interest can be paid or disputed upon specious grounds ; and if it should ever become necessary, argued his Grace with perfect reason, the capital sums taken could be always replaced, or some satisfactory arrangement made respecting them. The powerful head of a noble house with places, pensions, and a score of church livings at his disposal invariably finds his poor relations manageable—and if not, there was the Court of Chancery, where suits lasted till the original cause of them was forgotten.

Therefore his Grace, who knew well what he was about, and was fully aware that an English duke can do no wrong, granted life annuities by the dozen ; and made debt support debt, as his ancestors had done before him : which is an easy thing to do for any one who has the world's respect, his friends' credit, his kinsmen's hopes and property in custody, and is

legally provided with a life interest in false appearances. He signed his name to more papers than he could remember, as his father and grandfather had alway done, giving greedy people large shadows for their substance. If his affairs were in inextricable confusion, if he was utterly insolvent, he was neither better nor worse off than some other noblemen, and it was really no business of his. When his son came of age the estates must be resettled, as was usual and convenient; and money could be raised in this way, as it had been when he himself attained his majority. By-and-by a rich marriage would set all to rights. If he died before his son was twenty-one, death naturally settled a nobleman's debts, which did not survive in legal claims upon his property like the debts of common people. On the contrary, his son would escape all liability even for moneys which had been spent on his own education, pleasure, and amusements, and might enjoy his creditors' goods in peace and with a tranquil mind. All former trusts, settlements, bills, bonds of the Duke of Courthope would become waste paper when the Duke of Courthope was dead, though the Duke of Courthope lived for ever. If

kindred, friends, and tradespersons were so silly as to be deceived by false pretences, they must pay the penalty of an extreme and egregious folly ; for the law of entail allows a nobleman to contract engagements based on a fortune of a hundred thousand pounds a year, though he is really not worth ten pounds, seeing that he may die five minutes after he has incurred an obligation. There was even a well known instance in the Courthope family, for the late Duke had died only a few days after he had borrowed from a relative, and as a debt of honour, a very large sum of money which had passed intact into the hands of his successor, having been paid away in a lump sum for his benefit. But his Grace never repaid a sixpence, nor was his honour in any way compromised by his refusal to commit a breach of the law merely because a frantic cousin raved about its cruelty. On the other hand, the frantic cousin was excluded from good society because he was frantic and ruined. Indeed, no consideration upon such subjects ever troubled his Grace's conscience or digestion. Besides, there was a banker's daughter in the market. She had a fortune of five millions sterling ; and the Duke had been privately in-

formed by Lady Overlaw, his friend, relative, and very intimate counsellor, that the banker longed to have his child martyred and glorified as duchess presumptive of Courthope. He was not sure, if the banker behaved himself, that his son, Lord Kinsgear, should not marry her; though this son had been engaged from his cradle, by a family compact the Duke had never quite understood, to Amabel, daughter and sole heiress to Lord George Wyldwyl, his Grace's uncle, commander-in-chief, by birth and patronage, of Her Majesty's forces in India. Mr. Mortmain, the Duke's family solicitor, knew more of this compact, and the Duke thought it might be well to consult him.

## CHAPTER V.

## MR. MORTMAIN.

MEANTIME his Grace the Duke of Courthope, while revolving these and other projects in his mind at leisure, had taken a fancy to an estate in Chancery which might be got out of it with a little money and interest, so he had sent for Mr. Mortmain, his family solicitor, to pull the strings of his new puppet. Mr. Mortmain had hastened to obey the summons of his illustrious client, and the Duke had ordered a dog-cart to fetch him from the station. As he sat in the library, looking at a pair of new guns which had just arrived from Manton's, he heard the wheels of the dog-cart returning with the lawyer in it; and he pressed a large hand bell which stood upon the carved oak table before him.

An Italian valet answered the loud silver sound of the bell. No country but Italy now produces servants illiterate enough to do their

duty contentedly. The Duke told his valet to show Mr. Mortmain up at once, and to take care that he did not tumble against anything. Mr. Mortmain was near-sighted, and the Duke ordered Giovanni to bring him just as he would have asked for a parcel containing something fragile.

‘How are you, Alderman?’ said his Grace, in a high falsetto voice between a squeak and a roar; for most of the Wyldwyls spoke not only loudly but had an intonation peculiar to themselves, which manner of speech may be observed to characterise whole families who borrow it the one from the other.

‘I hope I see your Grace quite well?’ answered Mr. Mortmain, in more conventional tones, replying after the custom of his age and profession by a question to a question.

‘Pretty well, thank you, Alderman,’ returned the Duke, without looking up from his gun case.

‘A little gout at times, but that is good for the complexion.’ It may be here observed that Alderman was not Mr. Mortmain’s Christian name, but it pleased the Duke to call him Alderman (it was a way his Grace had to give nicknames), and it pleased Mr. Mortmain, for business reasons and the fruit of the toady tree,

to accept any appellation the Duke chose to bestow on him.

‘If I might be permitted to say so,’ now remarked Mr. Mortmain, ‘your Grace is looking in remarkably vigorous health. I perceive by *Dod’s Peerage*, a work to which Mrs. Mortmain occasionally refers in my presence, that there is not any extreme difference between your Grace’s age and mine, yet I am quite grey, whereas ——’

‘Ah,’ screamed the Duke again in that amazing falsetto, ‘old fellow, are you, Alderman? I dare say. My hair was always black, and always will be. You are of a different breed, Alderman. But how about Gripwell’s trustees; have you raised the money to satisfy them? Their estate takes a corner out of my property, and if any radical fellow were to get hold of it, he might play old Harry with my deer.’

‘I fear, your Grace,’ replied Mr. Mortmain, who spoke very slowly and precisely, ‘I fear—ahem—we shall not be able to raise the money. Except,’ he added, after a pause, ‘by means of life insurances at a very considerable interest.’

‘Ah, that your’s business, Alderman,’ shouted the Duke, shrilly. His Grace often shammed

being a fool in money matters, but he was not so. By this method, however, he frequently caught people out, and induced them to commit themselves, just when they thought they had overreached his innocence; that is to say, he did this when he considered it worth while to catch them. Sometimes he had other designs.

‘I have not yet been able to devise any means by which sufficient funds can be raised to purchase the Gripwell estates at present,’ resumed Mr. Mortmain, nursing his right leg with an absent, wistful look.

‘Why not, Alderman?’ piped the Duke. ‘My son will cut off the entail, and resettle the estates as soon as he is of age.’

‘Why, yes, your Grace,’ replied Mr. Mortmain, ‘but we have to deal, as you are aware, with a very troublesome old gentleman, named Brown, who firmly maintains that his sister was married to the late Duke. In fact, he seems to hold proof of this marriage, after which, he avers,’ continued Mr. Mortmain, consulting some notes in his pocket-book, ‘that his sister was decoyed to Italy, and there forcibly placed in a convent at Naples. She fled thence with the assistance of a person who obtained access to

her, and was delivered of a daughter. If that daughter survives she is unquestionably Countess of Winguid.'

'And I?' asked the Duke, hoarsely.

'In that case,' returned Mr. Mortmain, blandly, 'your Grace would have no name. Many of my clients among the hereditary nobility are in that delicate position; but as we are in possession, we might possibly effect without difficulty such a compromise as would admit of your Grace retaining the title, and a portion of the life interest in the estates of her ladyship, the Countess.'

The Duke was very pale. He had quite lost his hoity-toity manner, and got off his stilts. 'She could only take the Scotch titles and property,' he said, clutching at a straw, 'eh, Mortmain?'

'She could only take the Scotch titles,' said Mr. Mortmain, dryly, 'but she would inherit all the property save Beaumanoir, which would pass in the ordinary course to Lord George Wyldwyl, your uncle. It is also my duty to inform your Grace that in the case of Mademoiselle Zephirine Malvoisin, although we have satisfactory proof of the death of both mother

and son, and the brother is held by the double tie of an annuity and a forgery, yet your Grace's previous contract with that young lady is perfectly valid by the law of Ireland, where the Waifecoast estates and fisheries are situated, and they are the next important part of your Grace's inheritance. If, therefore, we could get rid of the late Duke's marriage with Miss Margaret Brown on demurrer, by alleging lapse of time and the Statute of Limitations, still, as the confessor of the late Duchess pointed out to her Grace, the prior claim of Mademoiselle Malvoisin unquestionably invalidates the completeness of your union with the Lady Helena Placard Cardwell. Moreover, although the sole surviving issue of this previous marriage is a daughter who has drifted into ruin and out of sight, having been last heard of as the companion of a French political convict at Cayenne, nevertheless she might make herself extremely troublesome if she ever got wind of her rights ; and we have really two bars sinister to surmount. Both are indeed out of view at present ; and it is for that very reason that I presume to suggest that your Grace had better not set the keen'eyes of

money-lenders to work, lest they should suddenly spy out something dangerous.'

'Dear me, Mortmain,' said the Duke, smiling graciously as he leaned back in his chair, 'if we were all to listen to you legal gentlemen we should hardly be able to believe in our own identity. All sorts of things have happened since the time of Noah.' His Grace pretended to have recovered his spirits, for it was not desirable that Mr. Mortmain should suppose that his startling communication had much affected his client. On these points his Grace was an admirable diplomatist. So instead of putting a grave face on the matter, he treated it as a mere ordinary gossip which rather bored him. Presently he said, yawning:

'By the way, Mortmain, have you settled that business with Mr. Sharpe? I cannot assign my Cornish mines to him. Confound it! I won't hear of it. They are the only things which always bring me in ready money, and if they had not dropped in last year on me as universal legatee of Lady Pencarrow, I should have almost known what it was to be inconvenienced; egad I should.' And the Duke showed his teeth, which were white and even

as ever. Nothing could be more agreeable and cordial than his manner.

‘Mr. Sharpe appears to have some information which he will not at present communicate,’ answered Mr. Mortmain, knitting his brows and again referring to his notes. ‘He therefore peremptorily insists upon security for the whole of his outstanding demands upon your Grace, and will listen to no delay or temporising. From what I can gather, the intelligence he has received, and which has urged him to such prompt and decisive action, has reference to some of your Grace’s family papers which came into his hands, in a manner which he declines to explain, as solicitor for the trustees of Sir Richard Porteous, whose estates have been for many years in the hands of his creditors.’

‘An attempt to extort money by threats is a punishable offence, Mortmain, isn’t it? We could catch him there,’ observed the Duke, who shared that foible common to big people of thinking himself very shrewd at law. ‘I could write a note to the Attorney-General, and we would have Mr. Sharpe in Newgate before he knew where he was. A criminal information is a serious thing, you know, Mortmain.’

‘I am afraid, your Grace, Mr. Sharpe is not the kind of fish who could be caught in that net,’ answered Mr. Mortmain, after a few minutes spent in deep thought. ‘From certain hints which he threw out, I am even apprehensive that your Grace might not find it altogether safe to irritate him; and I am never prepared to advise any hostile course of action, which it might be subsequently deemed more prudent to abandon.’

‘No,’ said the Duke, pursing his lips together, ‘it is never good to bark till one can bite—you’re right there. But, by George, he had better look to himself if he offends me. I’d take care he never set foot in this country any more.’

‘I think your Grace might, on the whole, find it better to get rid of his claim quietly,’ remarked Mr. Mortmain, scratching the point of his left ear, as he only did when in great perplexity. ‘He is rather an illiterate person, Mr. Sharpe, but I have been upon several occasions brought into contact with him professionally, and it has been my practice to recommend my noble clients to submit to his terms rather than take the risk of proceedings against him. Mr.

Sharpe,' added Mr. Mortmain, after a pause, 'has considerable influence in high quarters, and much money. It is my opinion that a criminal information could not be filed against him with any chance of success, however prudently the case was conducted, because we have at present few counsel of commanding ability at the bar; and even although we might possibly obtain a verdict against him he would appeal again and again, and he is a formidable adversary because he is not only I believe part proprietor of a daily newspaper, but he has also a strong party at the Home Office, and at Court.'

'Old Tythe, the Bishop's brother, you mean,' nodded the Duke.

'Ye—es,' mused Mr. Mortmain, 'and others: I should not be disposed to say confidently where his influence begins or ends.'

'I always knew he was a cunning fellow,' replied the Duke. 'My father, however, would have made him wince, though.'

'Ah,' sighed Mr. Mortmain, who was a sincere and honourable friend of the upper classes. 'Thirty years ago, your Grace, the nobility could do many things which now they cannot do.'

‘Come and look at my aviaries, Mortmain; I know you are a bit of a bird-fancier,’ said the Duke, pleasantly changing the conversation. ‘Dinner will be ready in an hour. There will be nobody here but the chaplain, and my cousin, Lady Overlaw. We must drink a bumper in memory of the good old times after dinner.’

‘Will your Grace permit me to make the necessary alterations in my dress before I have the honour of being presented to her Ladyship?’ asked Mr. Mortmain, with his best company voice and manners.

‘No,’ said the Duke, with a kind despotic way he could make very charming. ‘Half an hour is time enough to dress. Giovanni shall come to us when the first bell is going to ring for dinner, and I want your opinion on my golden pheasants.’

‘Most honoured, your Grace,’ said the fascinated solicitor, who having honestly given his professional advice, was now naturally eager for good society.

‘By the way, Alderman,’ said the Duke, as they stood watching the beautiful birds whose golden plumage shone so splendidly in the last rays of sunset, ‘you know my son Kinsgear has

got his commission in the Guards. You will have to draw his marriage settlements next.'

'Are General Lord George Wyldwyl and Miss Amabel about to return so soon from India, your Grace? I had understood his Lordship's command did not expire for another year.'

'Ay, Alderman, but I was thinking of Lord Cursitor's daughter. Lady Overlaw tells me she will have five millions, and her father has behaved very well about a first charge on the Gripwell estates, which is in his hands.'

'I fail precisely to comprehend your Grace,' said Mr. Mortmain, gravely.

'Egad, Alderman, I speak plain English too. My son, Lord Kinsgear, shall marry Miss Penny, Lord Cursitor's daughter. Will that do?' laughed the Duke.

'Why, no, your Grace, certainly not,' replied Mr. Mortmain, decisively.

'How's that?' asked the Duke, throwing up his head like a strong horse that chafes upon the curb.

'Why not?' said Mr. Mortmain, in some surprise. 'Because,' he added slowly, 'Lord George Wyldwyl, your uncle, is unquestionably

Duke of Courthope and Revel, and when he, being a widower, waived his claim to inherit on the demise of the late Duke, it was upon the express condition that, should your Grace marry, his only daughter should become the wife of your heir ; and this was a generous stipulation, for Lord George might have prohibited your Grace from marrying at all. Such, however, were the terms of 'the family compact.' They prevented some scandal at the time ; and it would be not only in the highest degree unsafe, but it would be utterly impossible for your Grace to make any successful attempt to evade them.'

## CHAPTER VI.

## AN EPISODE.

To explain this disagreeable intimation of Mr. Mortmain's we must go back for a moment to an episode in the life of the Duke of Courthope's predecessor, the first Duke of that name mentioned in these pages.

In the latter half of the first decade of the present century, then, the moral tone of English society was unquestionably susceptible of improvement. A 'delicate inquiry' into the conduct even of a former Princess of Wales was commenced by a committee of the Privy Council; Lords Grenville, Erskine, Spencer, and Ellenborough constituted themselves into an official divorce court, and many objectionable scandals were current. Most of these scandals were indeed disproved, as in the case of Her Royal Highness, the wife of the then heir to the throne of these realms. Nevertheless, perfect

innocence and full acquittal did not altogether silence the loud crow of slander, and many abominable falsehoods reflecting on the behaviour of blameless persons of the highest rank have come down to us with a lamentable and distressing semblance of truth still lingering about them. Thus, although it was well known that the young and beautiful Countess of Pen-carrow, residing in St. James's Square, was a lady of unimpeachable morals, yet her late husband's family, who were always squabbling about her dower, were ill natured enough to insinuate that the Duke of Courthope's curricle was seen too often before her ladyship's door of an afternoon. They even went so far as to assert that when his Grace was there, less noble personages, and especially two old maiden ladies from Cornwall, the Honourable Misses Poldragon, had been denied admittance. The statement could not have been true, because in the first place the Duke of Courthope's curricle, which was then the fashionable carriage, had been given by his Grace a week after it was purchased to his favourite brother, Lord Alfred Wyldwyl ; and there was this notable difference in their accounts of what had happened, that whereas

the Honourable Pamela Poldragon declared it was the Duke's shadow she had observed on the drawing-room blind of Lady Pencarrow's house, while looking out of her fly window before the maiden sisters drove away in dudgeon, on the other hand, the Honourable Priscilla averred as positively that it was the shadow of Lord Alfred, and that she had seen him buckle on his sword as he hurried away to mount guard at the palace.

However, this much is certain, that if the Honourable Misses Pendragon had been refused admittance to the privacy of their cousin while the Duke of Courthope or his brother were nevertheless received, that circumstance could only have arisen from the fact that her Ladyship was overwhelmed with grief for the death of her venerable husband, and inconsolable during the first years of her widowhood. If the Countess consented to see the Duke, and footmen were running all day long, when the Duchess was out of town, between Whitehall and St. James's Square, nothing could be more natural or creditable to both of them. His Grace was a most kind-hearted nobleman, and had frequently been known to visit bereaved ladies

from motives purely philanthropical. Lady Pencarrow was a distant kinswoman of his, a remote ancestress of the noble family of Trecorne, from which she descended, having married Sir David Wyldwyl of the Mount, in the reign of Charles II. ; and the Duke had all the proper pride which becomes the hereditary chief of an illustrious house, in extending his countenance and protection to its most distant connections. Now the Countess of Pencarrow had been left extremely well off by her deceased husband, and she required a great deal of advice as to the management of her estates and the re-investment of her funded property. No one could give her wiser counsel on this subject than her illustrious relative, and when the present Lord Trecorne, who would have been not unwilling to advise the wealthy widow himself, ventured to express some doubt of his Grace's financial capacity, suggesting that he (Lord Trecorne) was the proper person to give counsel touching the pecuniary affairs of his kinswoman's estate, the Duke had him out on some futile pretext one cold morning in Kensington Gardens and shot off his ear, after the custom of the age.

But this was of little use. The Duke of

Courthope could not shoot off the ears of all the world, and tales were told by some who took care not to place their ears in jeopardy. So Queen Charlotte looked sourly at the Countess of Pencarrow when next she went to the drawing-room, and even Lady Jersey, the leader of the opposition, warned her ladyship that she dared not visit her.

Just then a curious thing happened. Her Grace the Duchess of Courthope and Revel drove in state to Ascot races, on the great day when the King and Royal family were there, and beside her in the same carriage was the Right Honourable the Countess of Pencarrow. Now the Duchess was almost a saint upon earth, and could issue certificates of character to whom she pleased. She was a pale feeble little woman, who passed her life doing good, and was seldom seen beyond her domain of Beaumanoir. She very rarely came to London, except to make her purchases at Christmas time, and once a year just after Easter, when her splendid suite of drawing-rooms at Whitehall were thrown open to all the town who were born with or had attained a right to be there. At such times it was remarked by very keen observers that her Grace possessed a

remarkable energy of character under her quiet and languid demeanour. Very shortly after her marriage she had arranged her own plan of life, and had adhered to it ever since. She had never had any children, and except on very rare occasions she and her husband lived entirely apart. They were very good friends. He always took counsel with her in any serious difficulty, and a single word from those thin pale lips of hers was a command to him. She rarely interfered with his business or pleasures, and treated him with an indulgent kindness, much as if he were a wayward child who could not help getting into scrapes, and who must be got out of them as noiselessly as possible when he did so. They loved each other really more than any one else in the world, but neither of them knew it, and nothing could be more indifferent than their behaviour till some danger or difficulty unmasked their hearts.

Now it had so happened that Lord Trecorne was extremely annoyed at the loss of his right ear, and cast about for some means of revenge which would not involve the loss of the other ear. As it was well known that the Duke's affairs were greatly embarrassed, he had no difficulty in

finding a safe and convenient mode of attack. Indeed, an opportunity for commencing hostilities presented itself unsought. His Grace was sole surviving executor of a gentleman who had left a large sum of money in India bonds; and when this gentleman's son and heir came of age these bonds were not forthcoming. The heir had applied to the Duke many times on the subject, and had been treated with courteous delay. He was asked to shoot pheasants at Beaumanoir, and to stalk deer at the Duke's place in the Highlands. He was asked to dine at Whitehall and the Beefsteak Club. Once, too, he got an invitation to Carlton House, and there was some talk of giving him a place about the Regent's Court, when those desirable appointments were first made in the month of February, 1811, just as the delights of the London season were about to begin. But the young heir could hear nothing definite about his India bonds, and as he wanted to marry a ward of Lord Trecorne, his Lordship pressed him to insist upon a satisfactory explanation.

Then it chanced that whenever the young man, whose name was Dowdeswell, called at Whitehall the Duke of Courthope was out of

town, and if he wrote to Beaumanoir, an answer came from Scotland, and every answer contained some wonderful excuse.

This correspondence being ultimately placed before Lord Trecorne, ever smarting from the loss of his ear, his Lordship looked at it with a grim smile ; and then said, not without some contempt in his voice,

' You have lost your money, my poor boy. That scoundrel has cheated you, as he cheated my cousin Lady Pencarrow, as he cheats everybody who has anything to do with him. You cannot arrest him because he is a peer. You cannot make him pay you because his property is protected by the law of entail, and he has no son, so you cannot obtain any security from him that is worth a rush, because he may die to-morrow and then his bond would be waste paper. But there is one thing you can do—you can impeach him for a misdemeanour.'

Impeachment was rather in fashion just then. Lord Melville had been impeached in 1806, and even his Royal Highness the Duke of York was impeached three years afterwards. The result was of course in both cases an acquittal ; but an impeachment was a very serious

business ; and when the Duke of Courthope got wind of the fact that he was to be treated in that inconvenient manner, with angry, earless Lord Trecorne in the back-ground, he left town in great trepidation the same night for Beaumanoir.

The Duchess was gently surprised to see him. She was seated in her favourite room looking out upon her own rose garden, and which was fitted up with the furniture she had used as a girl. It was so full of nick-nacks that you could hardly move in it. There were little China figures worth perhaps a penny each, upon shelves of common wood, covered with odds and ends of velvet, which she had put up and arranged herself. There was a screen with some childish drawings neatly pasted on it, and one or two miniatures of some value ; among them a beautiful portrait of her husband painted on ivory by Tannock. The Duchess herself was dressed in a plain cotton gown rather primly made, with a cap and a cambric stomacher as white as snow. She was not more than forty years of age, but she looked older. Her face was very pallid and rather tired, her lips were almost white, and her large round eyes had an expression of habitual suffering, borne with that

good-humoured resignation which is merely heroism in slippers. Her voice was low and pleasant, but had decided undertones in it, which showed she was accustomed to be obeyed. She was painting a fan when her husband entered, and a companion-lady, with little ringlets growing round her forehead not unlike those of a poodle dog, was seated on a stool near her reading Miss Burney's *Evelina* aloud. A King Charles spaniel, which the Duke had given her five years before, lay fat and lethargic upon the sofa.

‘How do you do?’ said the Duchess, looking sideways at her work, and pretending to pout. ‘Why did you not say you were coming? I would have had a dish of tea for you. See now what you have lost by surprising quiet people who are not used to fine company.’

‘My dear,’ answered the Duke, as impatiently as ever he answered her, ‘I have something of importance to say to you.’

She looked at him now keenly, anxiously; and then went on with her painting for a few minutes. Presently she said in the softest and sweetest of tones to her companion, ‘Thank you,’ upon which that lady rose, and with the

practised virtue of a gentle footstep glided from the room.

What happened after she left was never precisely known, but the Duchess's confidential maid, coming in suddenly to dress her mistress for dinner, and not aware that the Duke was in her Grace's private apartments, found him fallen upon his knees at her feet and sobbing aloud, while her wasted fingers wandered tenderly in his hair and she soothed him with the wondrous music of a sublime affection. Her faded face was lit up with the light of a great resolution. She knew it now. She had loved that splendid spendthrift all her life ; given him her very existence : thought for him, hoarded for him, denied herself all her wishes that he might continue to be magnificent. She had protected him a thousand times : who would, or could, do so if she did not ? And now she would sacrifice and offer up her very womanhood to save him.

And that was how it chanced that the Duchess of Courthope went with the Countess of Pencarrow to Ascot races, and the two ladies were inseparable for six months afterwards ; so that her Ladyship and her Grace were together

in the same room with no one but Dr. Keate, the Locock of the time, when a son and heir was born, amidst general rejoicing, to the magnificent inheritance of the double dukedom and its fortunes.

No more was heard of the impeachment after that. Mr. Dowdeswell's friends were somehow satisfied, or pacified, and in due time the Countess of Pencarrow, as we have seen, bequeathed all her property to the son of her friend the good Duchess, that is to the Duke of Courthope whom Mr. Mortmain so sorely plagued. It was not until her Ladyship's death that it appeared, on examining her papers, that the whole of that cruel story which had amused the Regency, proved nothing but the folly of the world in judging from appearances. The Earl of Pencarrow, a sort of human dog in a manger, had left all his unentailed estates and accumulations to his widow on the condition that she should not marry again, leaving her to burn with unholy fires—or to wither; and though such a provision in a will was against public polity and morality, it could not be disturbed. When, therefore, little more than a year after the crabbed old man's death, the beautiful woman

he had condemned to sterility and loneliness fell in love with Lord Alfred Wyldwyl, the Duke, who was a shrewd nobleman, suggested that they should be privately married by his own domestic chaplain; for the very sufficient reason that Lord Alfred was a younger son who had been brought up with the costliest tastes, accustomed to the most expensive luxuries, enjoyed an almost unlimited command of money during his father's lifetime, and now had not a sixpence but his lieutenant's pay; so that if he had married a portionless wife they must have genteelly starved. By leaving the testamentary arrangements of the dead lord undisturbed, and acting in defiance of them, they passed six happy months together; when, just as Lord Alfred was promised a lighthouse and a sinecure clerkship in the Court of Equity, worth together about 10,000*l.* a year, and which would have set the young couple at their ease, he was killed by a fall from his horse while riding back from Ascot races to Windsor barracks. After his death it was of course more necessary than ever to conceal a marriage which would have left the poor Countess completely beggared. Therefore, the Duke happening to want a son for financial

purposes, the brotherly arrangement was made by which her Ladyship's child passed for that of the Duchess ; and, so far as the world was concerned, this secret was fairly well kept.

Such was the piece of family romance which Mr. Mortmain recounted to the Duke between the first and second dinner bells. It reminded the Duke that he simply held his title by one of those family intrigues, which, planned at first for mercenary ends, are ratified afterwards to prevent the disgrace of exposure.

## CHAPTER VII

VINGT-ET-UN.

THE Duke made no answer to Mr. Mortmain, but it was remarked by all such of his retainers as came into contact with him during the next few days that he was in a thoughtful and dejected mood. Mr. Mortmain's communication was of course no news to the Duke, for he had been himself a party to the family compact, and had put his signature to certain secret documents which made it binding. But whether it was heedlessness, or the sense of security which possession begets, or a convenient belief in the magnanimity of his uncle, Lord George—anyhow, the Duke had gradually come to look upon the family treaty as a thing which could be evaded without much difficulty. Lord George was a simple, kind-hearted soldier to whom a dukedom could be of no use; and he had too chivalrous a regard for the honour of the house

of Courthope to engage in any law-suit which would brand one of its members with infamy. It might easily be represented to such a one that it were better Lord Kinsgear should marry Miss Penny and her five millions, and the house of Courthope continue illustrious, than that he should espouse Miss Amabel Wyldwyl and the lustre of the said house grow dim for lack of gold. Lord George might frown at first ; but the wealth and fame of great families can only be sustained by repeated acts of self-denial on the part of individual kinsmen, and surely the five millions of a Miss Penny were a prize which all the Wyldwyls, even to the remotest degree of cousinship, ought to combine in securing for the titular head of the house. These five millions would, indeed, revive the Courthope influence in all its pre-Reform-Bill splendour.

Lord Cursitor was one of the kings of Lombard Street, and there was no object in life which an alliance with a plutocrat of such power would not enable the Courthopes to compass. All debts might be cleared off and a peerage—say an earldom—with descent in the female line might easily be provided for Lord George, who, instead of enjoying the barren satisfaction of

seeing his daughter wedded to a duke in rather embarrassed circumstances, would bequeath her a peerage in her own right ; besides which, a couple of hundred thousand pounds or so might be handed over to Lord George out of the five millions, to help him gild his new coronet. Thus argued the Duke, and, in truth, he formed many other attractive schemes out of Lord Cur-sitor's cheque-book ; wherefore Mr. Mortmain's remarks damped him. The family solicitor has taken the place of the confessor in Protestant households ; and it was not pleasant to hear respectable Mr. Mortmain talk as if the mar-riage compact were a thing almost sacred in its nature—a thing which it would be signally dis-honourable even to hint at infringing.

Such men as the Duke of Courthope are moulded out of curious inconsistencies. Ready to be mean when it suits them, they wish to seem for ever on the stilts of honour; and though they may deliberately plan some piece of pitifully underhand work, with the easy conviction that the end justifies the means, yet a word of stern censure is often enough to check them, although it will leave on their minds not a sense of shame at their own baseness, but one

of irritation that their censor should be unable to comprehend and admire their views. Mr. Mortmain's remonstrances led the Duke of Courthope dispiritedly to suspect that Lord George Wyldwyl might, after all, by no means enter into his schemes. Religious or soldierly scruples might impede him. Perhaps he would urge that private honesty should go before public prestige—that, being by right Duke of Courthope, he had no business to waive his daughter's claims for the sake of advancement in another direction—that he had consented to an imposture simply to shield the family escutcheon, but would not perpetuate it for the chance of profit ; and that, on the whole, this barter of Lord Kinsgear's name against Miss Penny's millions was a sorry traffic, unworthy a knight and a nobleman. In fact, there was no knowing to what lengths Quixotism might push an old soldier, who, though yielding as a woman on some points, was inflexible as iron on others ; and the Duke of Courthope chafed by himself, repining at the folly of men who might be so happy if they would only stretch their consciences a little when needful. This is why during a few days he walked about dejectedly ;



and this is why he began to pay some attention to his son, cogitating by what other means this young man might be made useful to him. Trained from his birth to consider the greatness of his house as the paramount aim of his existence here below, the Duke of Courthope was naturally prone to plotting ; and little bits of chicanery that might conduce to his behoof seemed as necessary and proper to him as the tricks of statecraft do to kings.

The Marquis of Kinsgear—as the Duke had stated to Mr. Mortmain—had lately obtained a commission in the Life Guards, just like many other idle young men of rank about town. But here all resemblance between himself and these young men ceased. He had been brought up till he was more than twelve years old by his mother, and his character had been permanently formed by her teaching. She had lived after her tacitly arranged separation from the Duke of Courthope, at first with her father, and after his death with her mother alone. Subsequently she had lived by herself in a house in Park Lane which she had inherited from them, but which was set down in peerages and court guides as one of the town residences of the

stately peer whose name she bore. To the last their Graces kept up the comedy, which had been played for the first time by special licence in Whitehall. But wherever the widowed wife resided, her house was the constant resort of the higher Roman Catholic clergy, and the principal French emigrants of noble families who had from time to time taken refuge in England against political persecutions. Thither flocked with modest steps, and often humbly clad, the gentlemen and ladies of the great houses of Rochefoucauld and Noailles, Crusalles and Harcourt ; one had been a music master during the Revolution, one an usher in a suburban school, and all had to earn their living as they best could. Their discourse and example shook her Grace's faith in the security of hereditary property very considerably, and she early determined that her son should learn a mechanical trade. In accordance with this view she decided, after some consideration and consultation with her confessor, who was also director of her conscience, that the young Marquis should become a locksmith ; because, argued the confessor very sensibly, men would always desire to place their goods in security while the world

lasted, and the best method yet known of doing so was to lock them up. The lad was taught to rise early, fare simply, work hard, and sleep on a bed much too narrow and not half soft enough for a servant who respected himself. From the time he was ten years old nobody was allowed to do anything for him. He was taught to suffice for himself with his own hands ; and his Lordship threatened to grow up with as much use for a couple of dukedoms and a hundred and fifty thousand a year as a heather grouse has for a coach and six. On his mother's death he might have been turned into the streets without a sixpence, and found the next day gaining an honest living by the contented labour of his own hands.

The Duke his father was extremely shocked at this state of things when his son and heir appeared again at Beaumanoir for the first time since babyhood. His Grace wrote immediately to Dr. Porteous to recommend him the best Eton tutor, and sent the Marquis forthwith on this divine's suggestion to a crack boarding-house known as the 'House of Lords,' where young noblemen learned to be fagged, to fag, drink champagne and shandygaff, toast sausages, and

write bad Latin verses. The Marquis did not take naturally to his new position, however. Whether it was that he had inherited some of the mental qualities of the Irish cheesemonger, one of his mother's ancestors, or whether his mind was imbued with that keen logical spirit which she had derived from her French progenitors, he never could be brought to take much interest in Latin verses or Greek roots. He lounged about in the shops whenever he could slip away from his noble schoolfellows, formed strange acquaintances, and picked up out-of-the-way trade secrets. He learned how to cure a smoky chimney, how to make or mend a chair, and even how to build a boat, but he took no pleasure in cricket or football. He was a quiet, silent, self-contained boy, always doing something odd. His tutors liked him because he gave them no trouble and got into no scrapes. His schoolfellows liked him because he was neither sulky nor bumptious, and paid his subscriptions regularly. He seemed to have no use for money. Lady Pencarrow gave him a hundred pound note every time he went up to school, and his father gave him as much more. Lady Overlaw, too, his father's intimate friend

and near connection, gave him something, and he left the money in an open drawer of his table, sending anybody there who wanted it. Sometimes it was gone before the holidays came round again, sometimes it was not. He did not know and did not care: he spent none of it, and wanted none of it. If he found a roll of bank-notes or a heap of sovereigns in his way when looking for a chisel or a screw he had mislaid, he pushed them impatiently aside into a corner with the head of a hammer or whatever he happened to have in his hand.

The Duke could not make him out at all. His Grace would find his son and heir studying the mechanism of a new gun and making alterations in it with a file, his hands begrimed and oily, instead of following the dogs through the stubble and turnips. He invented a new adhesive horse shoe, and an elastic horse shoe. When a hunting box was taken for him in the shires from Mr. Sharpe, who had one at his disposal, he did not hunt: it bored him.

‘Lucy,’ said the Duke one day to Lady Overlaw, who was an amusing woman of the world and passed much of her time at Beau-manoir, ruling his Grace, certain naughty people

said, even more than he ruled her, 'I wish you would put some polish on that boy. He is the most extraordinary person I ever saw. He was mending a rake for one of my gardeners just now.'

'Send him out as an *attaché* to Vienna for a year,' replied her Ladyship. 'Diplomacy is a stupid profession, but he will learn the value of his rank in it.'

'No,' answered the Duke, drily, 'that won't do.'

'You mean that you want him at home?'

'Precisely,' said the Duke.

'But you can send for him before he comes of age.'

'Ah!' answered his Grace, quickly, 'but I do not know who might get hold of him in the meantime.'

'I declare there seems a fate upon us all,' said Lady Overlaw, with a pretty shrug. 'None of the family ever has a penny, and whenever any of us comes of age we are beggared for life. You will want him to cut off the entail and resettle the estates, just as you did yourself.'

'You would like to see your settlement put right, I suppose?' observed the Duke, who had

a way of giving his arguments a form which generally interested those with whom he conversed.

‘To be sure I should,’ replied her Ladyship, promptly.

‘Well, then, he must do it.’

‘Mr. Sharpe, your Grace,’ said a servant, entering with a card upon a golden salver.

‘Shew him into the library,’ returned the Duke.

‘Take care,’ exclaimed Lady Overlaw, shaking one of her be-ringed fingers with a pleasant smile, ‘take care, Duke. It will be three years before your son can play at vingt-et-un.’

‘Don’t croak, Lucy,’ answered his Grace, much amused; then he walked with head erect and in excellent spirits to receive his visitor.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## REAPING THE WHIRLWIND.

MR. SKIPWORTH SHARPE was standing on the terrace of the Beaumanoir gardens, and contemplating a large blue and red parrot, between whose trade and his own he seemed to discover some affinity, and so doing he waited thoughtfully for the Duke of Courthope. 'All the dukes I ever knew,' mused the Yorkshire lawyer, 'are to be managed by fear. You can get nothing out of them in any other way, for they are strong enough to defy a public row, and are not to be gammoned at any price.'

'How are you, Sharpe?' said the Duke, emerging from the drawing-room window just as the Yorkshire attorney's cogitations had led him up to this conclusion. His Grace was still a very handsome man, upright, grand, splendid. He wore a good deal of jewellery, as perhaps becomes a duke, but it did not look vulgar and

obtrusive like Mr Sharpe's jewellery, and the first thing which struck an observer was his gallant figure and frank face with its sweet and genial smile. There was something courtly and *debonnaire* even in the way in which he said, 'How are you, Sharpe?'

'Tol lol, yer Grace,' replied Mr. Sharpe, whose expressions smacked occasionally of the stable, and who mistook familiarity for ease of manner. Then he added, after a pause, 'in 'elth.'

'Come, that's good news,' said the Duke, cheerfully. 'It is something, at all events, to be well in health. I see you are admiring my parrot. A fine bird ; somebody christened him Cobden because of his fondness for self-assertion. But is anything wrong in other respects ?'

'Well, your Grace,' returned Mr. Sharpe, doubtfully, 'that's rayther among the may-bes. Your Grace is just a leetle deepish on the wrong side of my book ;' saying which he nodded to the parrot, who gravely cocked his head and appeared to survey him with interest.

'So much the better for your book, Sharpe,' answered the Duke, haughtily, with a touch of his hoity-toity manner, and he turned to begin

a walk down the pink marble pavement of the terrace. His Grace was very prompt at resenting the smallest impertinence when he thought he could do so safely ; if not, he stored it up in his memory, and kept a praiseworthy check on his temper.

‘ I’m afraid I must take your Grace down just a peg or two,’ rejoined Mr. Sharpe, striking out his short legs the better to keep step with the lengthy strides of the Duke, ‘ though it goes against the grain with me to do it ; but five figures made up of a seven, a six, and three oughts is a big lump of money.’ The parrot, who now seemed to have formed an estimate of Mr. Sharpe, stood up with disgust on his perch and shouted after him : ‘ Money ! ’

‘ You’ve got security,’ said the Duke, uneasily.

‘ I’ve got your Grace’s bonds,’ replied Mr. Sharpe, ‘ only the worst of it is they ain’t worth anything.’

‘ You will be so good,’ remarked his Grace, ‘ as to moderate your expressions while under my roof.’

‘ But suppose it ain’t under your roof ? ’ observed Mr. Sharpe, awkwardly.

Then the Duke waited for him, too wary a diplomatist to say another word. He had been cradled and brought up in statecraft, a dull-witted man, perhaps, and yet the traditions of his family, the unwritten laws of his order, the unconscious education of a lifetime, made him a match for the shrewdest where his own interests were concerned. His forehead was narrow and receded. He had neither wit nor imagination, but his perceptive faculties were enormous. He had been accustomed to deal with men and facts all his life; he had no fancies, no conscience perhaps, no crowd of thoughts to throng his mind and embarrass it in danger. He knew that the peril of which Mr. Mortmain had spoken was upon him, and he was fully prepared for it, whatever shape it might take.

‘ Ah ! ’ sniggered Mr. Sharpe, finding his Grace remained silent, ‘ that’s the rub. If you ain’t a dook at all, and land and ’ouses, with the rest of it, belongs to a country wench at a Tom and Jerry shop down at Wakefield, what becomes of my five figures ? ’

‘ Ah ! ’ answered the Duke, waiting for him

—aye, waiting for him with every faculty on stretch and edge, ‘ *if* goes a long way.’

‘ Well, it does,’ admitted Mr. Sharpe, candidly, ‘ but look ’e here. Perhaps you remember something of the “ Chequers ” inn, down at Wakefield-in-the-Marsh, where you stayed one night when your ’oss shut up with the Cloudesdale Hounds ? ’

‘ Haven’t the smallest recollection,’ interrupted the Duke, pompously, watching that the Yorkshireman should not gain an inch of vantage ground.

‘ Very likely not,’ continued Mr. Sharpe ; ‘ there’s no knowing. You nobs recollect what you want to recollect ; but it don’t signify in this case, because *I* recollect it. Now there was a barmaid down there, and I spotted her at once, because she was as much like your Grace as two peas in a pod.’

‘ Such likenesses frequently happen,’ remarked the Duke, playing with a toothpick, and watching, aye, watching.

‘ Yes, they do,’ resumed Mr. Sharpe, ‘ but there’s mostly some reason for them if we could find it out.’

‘ Reason in roasting eggs ! ’ observed the

Duke, thinking it just possible to start a false scent.

‘This reason, however, turned out to be that she is the late Duke of Courthope’s daughter ; though by some accounts it is not so clear that you are his Grace’s son,’ said Mr. Sharpe, plainly.

‘Wonders will never cease,’ drawled the Duke, still playing with his toothpick. ‘What proof have you got of this monstrous twaddle ?’ Whereat the parrot, catching the last word and adopting it with visible contentment, bawled : ‘Twaddle.’

‘I’ve got,’ replied Mr. Sharpe, ‘a copy of the marriage certificate, duly signed and attested, wuss luck ; and a very curuss way I got it too. Does your Grace remember I bought up Sir Richard Porteous’s I. O. U.’s which he gave you the year Plenipo lost the Leger ? It was them I. O. U.’s which brought me first in contact with Sir Richard, they did, and made me take his affairs in hand. Well, stop a bit ; I ain’t done yet, ye see. That “Chequers” inn was held by a chap named John Giles, under a copyhold lease from the Lord of the Manor of Wakefield, and when John Giles died I claimed

his best chattel for heriot custom. I looked over his sticks and traps, but could find nothing worth taking away, till I set eyes on an oak box, and noticed your crown and cypher on it, and says I to myself, "I'll have that." The girl who is so like you kicked up a bobbery about it at first. She said she kep' her things in it, and I told her to turn 'em out. She did turn 'em out. They were only a pair of old boot-tops, I think, with some scraps of rubbish, and I took away the box, thinking I might hear more about it some day; but, as ill luck would have it, I lost the key. Do what I could I couldn't open it; though I rather wanted to do so, for I never miss an opportunity, and I had noticed that it sounded hollow when rapped, and thought it might perhaps contain some queer thing or another: but I did not like to break it open, and could not find a key to fit it, till last week your Grace's son, the young Markis, called on me with your message to be sure and let you have some money this week.

"My Lord," said I, just as he was going away, "I know you understand a good deal about locks. What do you say to this one?"

"This," answered the Markis, poking into it a

long crooked nail which he took out of his waist-coat pocket, "is a Venetian lock of the fourteenth century, and bears the initials of the great Antonio Vernieri. It was probably used to keep some dark secrets."

"Can your Lordship open it?" I asked very civilly, for I'm sweet on the Markis.

"It can only be opened one way, Mr. Sharpe," said he, after trying his nail on it and thinking a bit.

"How's that, my Lord?" says I.

"Have you a strong quill?" says his Lordship.

"Yes, I daresay I have somewhere," I answered, without seeming to care too much about it, and when I told one of the clerks to bring in a quill he had the lock open with it in a jiffy. Then he looked at it as pleased as Punch, and began poking with his nail again.

"Ah," says his Lordship, presently, "I thought so, Mr. Sharpe. There's a false bottom, as there always is to these Italian caskets. See," and he pressed a hidden spring deep down in the lock where the staple went in, and up flew an inner lid. "There are some papers in here, Mr. Sharpe," said his Lordship, and he turned

on his heel and bid me good-bye, without looking at them. I'll be danged if that boy won't make an honest man, thinks I ; and so he will too.'

' I fail to understand how all this interests me,' said the Duke of Courthope ; and again the parrot with every appearance of satisfaction cried ' Interests me.'

' I'm coming to that,' replied Mr. Sharpe. ' Among those papers is the marriage certificate of Mr. Odo Wyldwyl and Margaret Brown. Mr. Odo Wyldwyl was the late Duke of Courthope and Revel. Margaret Brown was the mother of the barmaid at the "Chequers"—now Mrs. Brown, for she married another Brown, no connection of the others. She was rayther nuts I thought on your Grace that morning when I came for you, and the very cleverest thing you could have done would have been to have married her if you could have got that oak box and papers with her ; for she is neither more nor less than a countess in her own right, and every foot of land you have, every stick and stone in all your houses is hers. Now then, Dook, what are we to say about my five figures ? *That's* what I want to know.'

‘If you have got the certificate, she hasn’t,’ remarked the Duke, with perfect calmness and good breeding.

‘Confound these nobs,’ thought Mr. Skipworth Sharpe, ‘there is no upsetting their confounded coolness ;’ but he said, ‘That’s true enough, your Grace.’

‘I suppose you have no interest, Sharpe, in turning a barmaid into a countess, have you?’ asked his Grace, sitting down quietly on one of the cane chairs of the terrace and speaking in the pleasantest tone possible.

‘There’s an if and an to that side of the question,’ said Mr. Sharpe, taking another cane chair. ‘I’m not much afraid about my money as long as you live, but I should like to make the Markis fast, I should.’

‘That’s easily done,’ replied his Grace. ‘I will undertake to say my son will sign any papers you think necessary to secure your own interests.’

‘You know the Markis is only eighteen, and one never can say what may come about in three years. If you could get the signature of your uncle Lord George, I think I could see my way clearer, your Grace.’

‘Lord George Wyldwyl is in India,’ remarked the Duke of Courthope, whose mind was not very quick to seize a hint.

‘Lork, is he now?’ said Mr. Skipworth Sharpe. ‘Who’d have thought it? I shouldn’t if your Grace hadn’t told me.’

‘Do you mean to say you should see your way to further advances on Lord George’s signature?’ asked the Duke, who understood Mr. Sharpe now perfectly well.

‘With all the pleasure in life!’ said Mr. Sharpe. ‘Lord George is the next heir. He has just made a tremendous haul of prize-money, and he was rich before.’

‘And his daughter is engaged to be married to my son if I please, and nothing better turns up,’ said the Duke, with his accustomed hauteur coming back again.

‘I know all about Lord George, your Grace, and shall be quite satisfied with his signature, and you can draw up a letter for the Markis to write, pledging his honour as a gentleman that he will not plead infancy. I will take your life insurances on myself.’

‘Then I may write to Mortmain to close with the Gripwell trustees?’ inquired his Grace,

with extreme good humour, ‘and the rubbish you found in your box had better be treated as waste paper and put into the fire—eh, Sharpe?’

‘With all my heart, your Grace; only mind I don’t say there ain’t copies somewhere. However, I only look to myself, Dook. You’ve got authority from Lord George to receive his prize-money, which we both know you can get paid within the year; as soon as I see his Lordship’s handwriting I shall not look too close at it.’

‘When shall you be ready with the money, Sharpe?’ inquired the Duke, grandly.

‘Any day after Monday,’ replied the Yorkshireman. ‘If your Grace will send up the Markis with the papers properly signed, I will hand his Lordship the needful in the usual way.’

‘Dinner, Sharpe?’ smiled the Duke, as the first bell rung indoors.

‘Thank your Grace, I do feel rather peckish, that is to say, hungry,’ replied the lawyer.

‘The country air gives you an appetite,’ observed the Duke, with good humour. ‘My valet—Giovanni, you remember Giovanni—will get you anything you want.’

‘I have a white choker and shiny boots in my bag, your Grace, all ready,’ answered Mr.

Sharpe, who never put himself under an unnecessary obligation, and with these words he followed the Duke into the house. The parrot, more and more firmly rooted in his opinion of Mr. Sharpe, began a triumphant dance from one foot on to the other, and bawled after the retiring lawyer 'Twaddle !'

## CHAPTER IX.

## EVERY INCH A DUKE.

NOTHING could be more delightful than the Duke of Courthope's manners when his Grace was well pleased. He had set his heart on the purchase of the Gripwell estate, which lay on the borders of a part of his property which he never visited ; and now his desire was about to be fulfilled his satisfaction knew no bounds. It is not every man who could cloak his impressions under the perilous weight of secrets that hung over his Grace. Bearing a title that was not his, he knew that he was in two ways an usurper of all he saw around him. First, he was not the son of the late Duke and Duchess ; and, secondly, the late Duchess was no Duchess at all, seeing that her husband had been clandestinely married to a woman whose child might at any moment arise and turn the present occupant with disgrace out of name and home-

stead. In addition to all this, his Grace had himself, in imitation of the paternal example, married privately, and begotten children, who, if not legitimate according to English law, might yet come forward, on the strength of their mother's Catholic marriage certificate, and make young Lord Kinsgear's life a burden and a reproach to him. Such thoughts might well have scared a humbler mortal out of all manhood, and made him tread the avenues of Beaumanoir as if there were man-traps there. But not so with the Duke, who never appeared so happy as when employing his sagacity to avoid the pitfalls which everywhere beset him. His affectionate kindness to his son, from whom he was about to extort a mean advantage, was almost touching, and his courtly, rather old-fashioned politeness to his friend, Lady Overlaw, might have served for a model of refinement and high breeding ; so delicately was the tender regard of relationship and more intimate connection mingled with the chivalrous respect due to a lady highly descended, from a noble and a knight.

There are few such gentlemen now left in England as the Duke of Courthope ; he was

a nobleman of the best style, the very porcelain of human clay. He dressed, spoke, looked like a duke, and could have hardly filled any other place in the scale of creation than that of a duke. He really and truly could not say three words or bow to an acquaintance in the street, or write a letter, or do the smallest thing like a common person. The accent of his voice was ducal ; he spoke in a loud, clear, commanding manner, generally in a high-pitched, breezy tone, as if far above opposition or remonstrance. If he had not been a duke such a mode of speech would have been astounding and ridiculous. In his case it was merely characteristic, and not unbecoming. It was hardly possible he could have addressed an unknown cabman or a shopman in that manner, for they infallibly would and must have laughed in his face ; but he had little to do with such people. He very rarely entered a shop where he was not known, or came at all in contact with the outside vulgar. He had his place distinctly marked and defined in the modern life of England. It was quite true that his letters were different to the letters of other people ; but then a peculiar kind of paper of a yellow colour, with gilt edges, and

as thick and smooth as parchment, was made expressly for him, and stamped with the words 'Courthope House,' or 'Beaumanoir,' or with the name of any other of his palaces, to which a supply was sent when wanted. Of course, nobody else had such paper, or could use it. If his clothes were different to the clothes of common people, it was that his tailor, a high magnate who lived in Hanover Square, had special patterns made for him, and furnished them to no one else till he had ceased to wear them. A very august sort of tailor this, who had not more than three scores of customers, and would have nothing to do with the mere ruck of petty princes and small peers.

If the Duke of Courthope's personal ornaments were not jingling and offensive like those of Mr. Skipworth Sharpe, it was that they harmonised perfectly with his dress, and that their glitter was sobered by age and interest. Everything he wore had some historical association connected with his family, and was an heirloom which could not be bought. Among them was an opal which gave back a thousand gorgeous colours to the light as softly as an ancient

cathedral window, and was known in catalogues of famous gems as 'the talisman,' because tradition averred it had saved the life of Richard Plantagenet (him of the lion heart) from poison, by paling and growing dim when it touched a poisoned chalice. There was a brilliant of the purest water, which Queen Elizabeth had presented to Philip Wyldwyl, Earl Revel, after the defeat of the Armada, and the courtier had gallantly caused it to be engraven with a rose, as an emblem of the Maiden Majesty of England. There was an antique chain of gold of Florence workmanship, which Charles I. had unslung from his own neck when Sir Harry Wyldwyl, first Lord Courthope, had held the king's stirrup after the victory of Copredy Bridge, on the famous 29th of June, 1644. There was a turquoise marked with cabalistic characters, and of the deepest blue of the old rocks, which General Wyldwyl had wrenched with his own hand from the swarthy neck of Tippo Sahib at the storming of Seringapatam. In the evening he put on the star and ribbon of the Garter, with the star of the Hanoverian Guelphic order. These were the adornments which the splendid noble wore, as other Dukes of Courthope had

worn them before him. They were things which could not be purchased or imitated.

All the remainder of the week of his interview with Mr Sharpe the Duke charmed every one around him. He entered with serene good nature into his son's pursuits, and asked with a certain deference towards the young man, as though he were anxious to learn something new, what was the use of a turning lathe, and a vice. He examined the mechanical and scientific appliances of his son's workshop, indeed, much as he would have examined a tomahawk or a boomerang, and was utterly unable even to commit their names to memory. He had never before seen or heard of anything useful, and now the sight and sound of objects which his son averred could be turned to some purpose, seemed to come upon him with all the effect of a pleasant surprise.

'Ah,' said his Grace, with a creditable attempt to master a subject so dear to his son's mind. 'Bessemer's Co. prepares iron in a different way from the puddling process. Monstrously interesting. Explain it again to Lady Overlaw, Kinsgear. It is most important to the trade and commercial interests of this country;

and,' added the Duke, grandly, 'I give your Ladyship my word that I had not the smallest idea cast iron was made of arsenic—or arsenic of cast iron? which is it, Kinsgear? Ah! of course; cast iron is one of the ingredients of arsenic, and I can no longer wonder persons in the lower classes destroy themselves by eating it.'

The young man, mystified, but pleased, told all he knew, and more, of locks and the metals of which they are made; his father and Lady Overlaw listening to him with so much attention, that he rose greatly in his own esteem. It was, indeed, the first time his father had ever admitted him to an equality, and now all at once it seemed as if he were the greater man of the two, and his advice was asked about everything. Lady Overlaw actually solicited, with exquisite tact, his opinion about a new dinner dress, and begged him to help her design a costume for a masked ball she meant to give some day, as a novelty in London entertainments.

The most edifying event of the week, however, was the solemn procession of the whole party staying at the Castle to Beaumanoir Church, where the Duke of Courthope behaved

in a most exemplary manner, and pronounced the responses in his grandest voice, that every one might be convinced of the perfect propriety and orthodoxy of his religious convictions. His Grace was so good also as to explain to his son that it was generally thought a prudent and respectable thing to go to church in the country, and that noblemen of their rank could not decently avoid doing so. Then, as they walked homewards through the park, the Duke entered upon other confidential discourse with his heir ; praised himself for the improvements he had made in the property, extolled the value of land as an investment, because it was constantly rising in value, and the increased income derived from it kept pace with the growing cost of maintaining a nobleman's establishment. His Grace went into the minutest details of his affairs, explained that his expenses at Beaumanoir were just a thousand pounds a month, and that he always paid ready money for everything ; which was quite true ; but he did not explain how he got the ready money, till Lord Kinsgear's attention was almost bewildered with the number of new notions introduced to it. It was on Tuesday morning only that his Grace touched on

this subject, and then very briefly. Taking his son's arm affectionately he leant upon it, as though he were beginning to require some support, and thus gently led or guided the young man into the library.

Lady Overlaw watched the pair as they retreated, and, being of a warm heart and impulsive nature, stood for a moment having her pretty face reflected with a flush on it in the looking-glass. She liked young Kinsgear, as most people did, and felt a generous woman's pity for the honest, confiding boy who was being made the dupe of unworthy intrigues. For an instant her lips quivered and she brushed her handkerchief with just a slight tremor over her blue eyes, but it was only a passing emotion: 'After all, it's no business of mine,' she exclaimed, excitedly. 'I suppose every one does the best he can for himself in these times.' And she betook herself, with the philosophy of sensitive ladies, to her piano.

The Duke meantime, leading his son into his study, walked towards his letters, which lay spread out in dozens upon the massive library table; for every nobleman now-a-days is pelted day and night by missives hurled through the

post. He glanced at them and took in the nature of their contents at once. There was nothing of consequence. A dozen hopes deferred waiting till a dozen hearts sickened. Half a dozen applications for Government appointments through his Grace's influence or patronage. Petitions from clergymen for vacant livings. Here a poor relation's hungry appeal ; there a woman's prayer—neither worth answering ; with the usual rabble round of invitations, thanks, excuses, circulars, and letters on business which would do itself if left alone far better than it could be done by doing it.

‘By the way,’ said his Grace, carelessly taking up a note full of ingenious flatteries from an ardent Whig, who was fishing for an invitation to Beaumanoir, that he might advertise himself as a man of fashion in the *Morning Post* ; ‘by the way, Kinsgear, you can do me a great kindness this morning, if you are not otherwise engaged. I have to see the agent of our Irish estates, and he would hardly amuse you.’

‘I am ready for anything,’ replied the young man, ‘as long as my leave lasts. I have still three days more.’

‘The Horse Guards will grant an extension,

I suppose?' asked his father, who knew very well that the military authorities would do anything which they were ordered to do by his own intimate friend the Commander-in-Chief.

'I do not like to ask for more leave,' answered the conscientious officer. 'The other fellows don't like it, and they cry out about favouritism.'

'You don't care about that,' remarked his Grace, in his most magnificent way. 'You cannot remain to all eternity in barracks. I shall ask Lord George to appoint you on his staff when he comes home to take the command in Ireland next year. However, as you are not engaged, please take these papers for me to Mr. Skipworth Sharpe. You will find him at his office in London, and he will hand you the purchase money of the Gripwell lands. I am glad to say I have secured them, after a good deal of anxiety, and they will be to-morrow a part of the estates which will one day be yours.'

'I will go at once,' said Lord Kinsgear. 'I can order the dog-cart now, and catch the first train.'

'Won't you have out the drag?' enquired

the Duke, loftily. ‘The bay team wants exercise, and it’s four longish miles through the park.’

‘The dog-cart will go quickest, if you want me to set off directly,’ said the more practical young man.

‘As you like,’ replied his magnificent father. ‘Just put your name at the bottom of these papers, merely as a matter of form. You will see I have signed them myself, and so has Lord George Wyldwyl, who is of course interested in so important a purchase.’

‘I did not know the Indian mail was in,’ said Lord Kinsgear. ‘Is there any letter from Amabel?’

‘These papers came by the last mail,’ said the Duke.

The steward and the butler were called in to witness Lord Kinsgear’s signature; the young man affixed it to the papers without reading them, in a stiff, scrawly, youthful hand, and went upon his errand.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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